



MAN OF HIS WORD

A Biography of John A. Toews

by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger
with preface by David Waltner-Toews

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To the many who were influenced
by John A. Toews : students,
colleagues, family members,
and those in the pew.

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Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies
1-169 Riverton Ave.,
Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5
Canada

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Published simultaneously by Kindred Press, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2L 2E5, Kindred Press, Hillsboro, USA 67063 and Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5.

Printed in Canada by The Christian Press, Winnipeg.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Nafziger, Elfrieda Toews, 1938—

A man of his word

ISBN 1-895432-18-9

1. Toews, John A. (John Aron), 1912-1979.
2. Mennonite Brethren Bible College (Winnipeg, Man.) — Presidents — Biography. 3. Mennonite — Manitoba — Winnipeg — Biography. I. Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. II. Title. BX8143.T64N34 1992 289.7'092 C92-098025-2

Publisher's Foreword

Sixteen years ago Dr. John A. Toews was invited to return to Winnipeg to resume some teaching at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College and to help establish the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada. John A. Toews began his duties in the fall of 1976. His main interest in relation to the Centre was to create a sense of identity and historical consciousness among MBs, particularly in relation to their Anabaptist roots. His own identity and purpose had become strongly shaped by the so-called recovery of the Anabaptist vision, spear-headed by Harold S. Bender from Goshen, Indiana. Many of his students gained much of their appreciation for Anabaptism and for Mennonite history from the teaching, preaching and writing of John A. Toews.

It is most fitting, therefore, that the Centre assist in the publication of this biography written by his eldest daughter, Elfrieda. Although the archival collection at the Centre had its beginning before the arrival of J. A. Toews, particularly through the efforts of Herbert Giesbrecht, the Centre's broader mandate came to reality with the appointment of Toews. The concern about Mennonite Brethren identity which Toews tried to address is still a vital concern today, and the Centre is committed to addressing that concern in the context of Canadian and North American reality today.

A number of individuals contributed to the final editorial process and performed other tasks to make the manuscript ready for publication. An editorial committee, consisting of Sarah Klassen, Dave Duerksen, Herbert Giesbrecht and Abe Dueck, read the manuscript and suggested various changes. Most of the final typing and formatting was done by Mautji Pataki, Tony Chan and Alfred Redekopp. Others also assisted at various stages.

The Centre wishes to acknowledge in particular the substantial financial contribution for the publication given by Mrs. Nettie Toews, as well as contributions by Mr. and Mrs. C. C. DeFehr and Mr. and Mrs. A. C. DeFehr of Winnipeg.

Abe Dueck, Director
Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies
Winnipeg, Manitoba
January, 1992

Acknowledgements

My father, John A. Toews, died suddenly on January 13, 1979. Soon after, I began reading through his letters and files. I did not realise that this project, which would culminate in this biography, would span a full decade.

I would like to thank those who graciously consented to interviews or wrote letters providing helpful information. They include : Carl E. Armerding, Rita Block, Abe Dueck, Dora Dueck, Frank H. Epp, George Epp, Dan Friesen, Orlando Harms, Clarence Hiebert, Helmet Huebert, A. E. Janzen, Harold Jantz, Roy Just, William Johnson, A. J. Klassen, Henry Krahn, Abe Kroeker, Helen Kroeker, Wally Kroeker, John Longhurst, Tina Goosen Martens, Victor Martens, Harry Pankratz, James Pankratz, David Pauls, Lena Pauls, Frank C. Peters, Wesley Priebe, J. H. Quiring, Harold Ratzlaff, Viola Ratzlaff, Eric Ratzlaff, Charlotte Janzen Redekopp, John Regehr, Ann Schmidt, William Schroeder, Neil Snyder, William Snyder, George Thielmann, Agnes Thielmann, George Thiessen, J. B. Toews, Mary Toews, Paul Toews, Peter Toews, Victor Toews, Walter Unger, Cornelius Wall, John Wall, Katie Funk Wiebe, Vernon Wiebe, John Woodland.

Ken Reddig, Archivist for the Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, provided valuable assistance during my research at the Mennonite Brethren Studies Centre there. The staff at the Historical Library at Bethel College and at the Tabor College Library were also most cooperative.

My mother, Nettie Toews, was a constant source of support, as were my siblings: John, Wilma, David and Irene. When I was ready to give up, my husband, Wayne, encouraged me to continue.

Finally, I would like to thank the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, for publishing the book. Their readers, Abe Dueck, David Duerksen, Herb Giesbrecht and Sarah Klassen made many helpful changes to improve the manuscript but neither they nor any of the above are responsible for any errors it might contain.

Elfrieda Toews Nafziger
Manhattan, Kansas, 1992.

Contents

Publisher's Foreword	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Preface	ix
1. Childhood and Youth	1
2. New Beginnings	18
3. Formative Years	32
4. College Teaching	49
5. Leadership and Responsibility	89
6. Interlude	115
7. Return to MBBC	144
Endnotes	173
Photo section	77



PREFACE

The big Russian man crossed the church foyer, threw his arms around the frail, white-haired Nettie Toews, and burst into tears.

"Your husband was the only one who trusted me absolutely," he confided. As a member of a Russian church delegation, he had faced his share of distrust. Was he a member of the K.G.B.? Was he *really* a Christian? Such doubts seemed to plague everyone he had dealt with — everyone except John A. Toews.

For John A., as he was affectionately known, "yes" was "yes" and "no" was "no". He accepted other people as he expected other people to accept him — at face value. If someone claimed to be a brother or sister in Christ, then so it was. It was better to trust, to know the true meaning of communion among people, and to suffer the risk of betrayal, he would have said, than not to trust, and never to know that communion.

This, however, is but one image John A. Toews left to posterity. There are others. In fact, the act of writing this biography invited remembrances of John A. Toews from all over the world, some of them relating to his physical appearance and his habits, some to his faith, some to his family, some, but by no means all, flattering. For some of us, such as Elfrieda Nafziger, his eldest daughter and author of this biography, and myself, his youngest son — these images have not always been easy to reconcile with our own remembrances, or with each other.

"He had a shock of curly hair which rose from his head as quite a natural adornment," wrote a gentleman, now in Calcutta, India, who had known John during his sojourn in the conscientious objector camps in British Columbia during World War II. A roommate of his from graduate student days in Minnesota remembers how quickly John fell asleep and how loudly he snored, keeping him awake. As the son who inherited the curly hair, turning the "adornment" into a long tangle of rebellion in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I remember how his snoring paused when, as a

teenager, I crept through the back door of the house late at night, and how I waited for my mother to soothe him back into a snore with assurances that it wasn't so very late, really. Now, I also recall his ability to fortify himself with a brief *Mittagsschlaf* (mid-day sleep) after lunch, and how often I have been grateful to have inherited that ability to catnap.

Once a student of his at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College during the 1950s cornered me after a performance of my poetry, and conjured up an image of a stern, dogmatic dean of students, enforcing humourless rules. My father, this former student continued, inflecting his information into a question, would surely not have thought much of my poetry? I shrugged my shoulders. I wouldn't know, since he never commented on it. Later, a student of John's from the 1970s wrote how he clearly remembered my father reading poetry — my poetry — in class. The older children in the family can still vividly bring to mind the strong, traditionally molded father, who brought home — and embodied — the demands of the church institutions he worked for. These strict rules of conduct for preachers' kids, applicable to no one else, were chiselled into rock with great emotional thunder and lightning. But this stern law-giver was also our father, who, having done what was demanded of him, could stand back, quietly, while his wife Nettie "interpreted" the law, making it as humane and human as possible.

He somehow survived the conflicting demands of the church that he give up everything — security and family included — in order to devote himself to the work of the institution, and still remain the perfect family man. So, on the one hand, he could defend before his peers a son accused of heresy, knowing thereby the risks he took upon himself, while at the same time, argue vehemently with that son at home.

It is difficult, in writing the story of any man, to separate the individual from the historical and contemporary social milieu which made him possible, and to separate the memories of those who knew him from the man himself. There is a danger, in reviewing the life of a man as active in church and public life as John A. Toews was, to write it simply as a social or institutional history.

But for some of us — his children — this would ignore the whole complex of flesh-and-blood roots and earth from which the tree flourished. When, after twenty years of work in one of our church institutions, he received no public recognition nor even a word of thanks, not only were his ideals being contested, but he personally was slighted and our whole family, who struggled so hard all those years to live up to the public demands of that institution, experienced hurt. Yet incidents such as these led him into the wisdom of his later years, that institutions were made for people, and not vice versa, and that without love all the statutory dogmatism of hope and faith was meaningless.

For the family, then, this became a kind of victory. Father became more complex, more contradictory, more revealing of his humanity. Though always guarded about his deepest personal thoughts and feelings, as Mennonite men of his generation were, he could at last feel free enough to become an *Opa*, singing and telling stories to the little children on his knee, at home with gentleness and childlike laughter.

With all his contradictions, his dogmatism, sincerity, compassion and stubborn righteousness, his emphasis on the centrality of nonviolence in Christian evangelism at the personal and social levels, the story of John A. Toews is very much the story of his people, the Mennonite Brethren. For myself, it was his capacity to be open to new insights and ways of doing things — to truly grow and change — that gives me hope, not only for myself, but for his people and their institutions, with which he struggled his whole life.

1

Childhood and Youth

John Aron Toews was born in the Mennonite village of Rueckenau in the Ukraine on August 15, 1912, the third of four children and the elder of two sons of village school teacher Aron Toews and his wife Agnes (nee Harms). The Toewses, whose name derives from the biblical Matheus,¹ originally lived in West Prussia where many of the Mennonite Anabaptists had settled in the latter half of the sixteenth century after suffering persecution in the Netherlands. In Prussia the Mennonites attained such economic strength that by the late eighteenth century the Prussian Government passed legislation restricting their growth. When Catherine II of Russia offered free land as well as certain economic privileges and religious freedom, many of the beleaguered Mennonite farmers in Prussia were ready to accept the offer and in 1789 the first Mennonite colony was established in southern Russia. The Toewses migrated with a later group in 1823,² settling north of the Sea of Azov in the southern Ukraine, in the blackloam farming village of Fuerstenau, which had been founded by Mennonite immigrants in 1806.

Grandparents

John's paternal grandfather, Aron Toews (1841-1918) moved to Alexanderkrone when he purchased a *Vollwirtschaft* (large farm of 175 acres) in 1876. Land was available in consequence of the widespread Mennonite emigration to Canada and the United States following Tsar Alexander II's introduction of military conscription and Russianization policies. Even though the 1874 law allowed for noncombatant service, more than one-third of the Mennonite population (an estimated 18,000) migrated to North America.³

2 Childhood and Youth

Alexanderkrone, named for Alexander II, was founded in 1857 on the left bank of the Juschanlee River, tributary of the Molotschna River, and boasted productive orchards, good grazing lands, a tile factory, two windmills and a steam mill.⁴

Aron, a quiet, serious man, worked hard weekdays. On Sundays he was a *Vorsaenger* (songleader) in the local Mennonite congregation.⁵ This entitled him to the highly coveted *Dreiband* hymnal, which included music as well as words to well-known hymns. For six years Aron was also Alexanderkrone's *Dorfschultze* (mayor), the highest post in the village.⁶

Occasionally Aron took the family by horse and carriage to visit relatives, but he would not spend money on pleasure trips. Though he promised his children they could inherit his hard-earned money, it was the Bolsheviks who eventually divided it all among themselves.⁷

Life was not easy for his wife Justina (nee Reimer) (1844-1922), a woman of few words. She bore eleven children, four of whom died in infancy and one at age ten. She walked with difficulty because of rheumatism. For many years her suffering made the home atmosphere solemn.⁸

John's maternal grandfather, Johann B. Harms (1859-1942), an affluent farmer in the Friedensruh Village, owned a large farm, two small farms of less than 90 acres, as well as extra pasture land.⁹ He used modern machinery to raise wheat, barley, and oats. He and his wife Agatha, (nee Wiebe) (1865-1917) enjoyed a stately home with a glassed-in porch, tiled roof, orchards and flower gardens that were strewn with sand every Saturday evening. They kept splendid work horses and well-groomed mares in the stable and carriages in the adjoining farm machinery shed. The clan gathered at the Harms home for religious holidays, birthdays and anniversaries. The women used the spacious kitchen to prepare immense quantities of *Kuchen*, *Zwieback*, and *Platz* on such occasions. Grandpa Harms presided over festivities and especially enjoyed the grandchildren who paid their respects curtsying or stiffly bowing, as they had been taught by a Russian school mistress placed in the village by the government during World War I.¹⁰

While the Harmses enjoyed a good life, they were not without a social conscience. During the period of anarchy following the 1917 Revolution, a neighbour was shot by former employees and Johann's life also appeared to be in danger. In one of those remarkable turn of events, however, where one small act of unpremeditated kindness produces unexpected consequences, a sometime Black Sea fleet officer came to his rescue, testifying that in time of need Harms had given him a cow.¹¹

Parents

On January 9, 1884, John's father, Aron Toews, became the fourth Aron (three died at birth) born to Aron and Justina Toews.¹² Aron had two older brothers, Jacob and Johann, an older sister, Sarah, and two younger brothers, Abram and Peter. Jacob and Abram became farmers and the other three teachers. Aron Toews was nineteen years old when he apprehensively faced his first class of students, in the fall of 1903. He had passed the pedagogical exam with honours the previous spring in Sevastopol. There had not been a great deal of contemplation regarding a career. His older brother, Johann, whom he regarded highly, was a teacher. Johann, as well as Aron's parents and his Ohrloff *Zentralschule* (secondary school) teachers, had encouraged him to attend the Halbstadt Pedagogical Institute. The cost was 125-150 rubles per year, but since his father owned a large Alexanderkrone farm, he could afford the fees. While Aron was studying in Halbstadt, the nearby Kleefeld church council informed his parents about an opening in their school for an assistant teacher with an annual salary of 275 rubles. The parents wrote to Aron about the opening and with his consent accepted the position. They felt it was time he contributed to family income.

Teaching 40 to 50 Kleefeld students had little relation to what he had learned at the pedagogical institute where model teaching was critically evaluated in class. In his memoirs Aron laments his harshness with poor learners, and wishes he had displayed greater wisdom in dealing with discipline.¹³ The Wednesday night adult Bible studies in private homes were the highlight of his week. In

1906 he took a position in a recently built, two-room school in Friedensruh, where I.V. Neprash was senior teacher. Aron and Neprash were bachelors and so took their meals across the street from the school at the Johann Harmses. The eldest daughter, Agnes, who usually helped her mother prepare and serve the meals, soon caught Aron's eye. Her siblings, Jacob, Agatha and twins, Heinrich and Gerhard, attended primary school; Bernhard was in Alexanderkrone Secondary School and the eldest, Johann, helped with the farm.

Aron looked forward to the monthly district teacher conferences and the biannual in-service conferences for the whole Molotschna Mennonite Colony. The semiannual conferences helped establish a teachers library, organize educational excursions, and implement teacher courses. Following the 1905 Revolution and the granting of the four liberties (freedom of speech, freedom of press, liberty to assemble and establish associations) the teachers in the Mennonite colonies established a Teachers Association which Aron joined in 1906. Although some of the communities distrusted the new Association at first, it soon won their respect and in an official document a few years later was spoken of as follows: "The Association has increased and has been strengthened by its many-sided activities, the comprehension and capabilities of the teachers in all fields of the teaching profession and, what is of utmost importance, the Association cultivates love for the work and believes that faithfulness in the performance of duties is the highest virtue of the teacher."¹⁴ The political events of 1905 in Moscow and St. Petersburg seemed far removed from most of the Mennonite villagers who led relatively peaceful and prosperous lives compared to that of the vast Russian peasantry. Mennonite farmers were afraid of radical governmental changes, particularly in respect to land redistribution, which would threaten their bourgeois existence. Previous reforms had not benefited the Mennonites. The abolition of serfdom in 1861 lowered their social and judicial status by giving them the same rights as the new peasant class and requiring them to adhere to the new military law (1874).¹⁵ (Most Russian citizens felt these laws were more just than the previous ones which extended privileges to special groups such as the Mennonites.)

Mennonites, generally, were suspicious of the 1905 Revolutionary slogans and felt relieved when they came to naught. Aron, however, was disturbed by the brutality with which the Revolution was quelled.¹⁶

In 1907 I.V. Neprash left Friedensruh to found a Preachers Seminar in Astrachan. Aron became principal, or head teacher, with a salary increase to 450 rubles a year. He was relieved when he failed the military draft health test because of weak lungs and felt free to contemplate marriage. He had had his eye on Agnes Harms since the fall of 1906, and she accepted his marriage proposal in May of 1908. Some wondered what attracted this vivacious, beautiful 21-year-old maiden to the stern, taciturn teacher, but their contrasting traits complemented each other throughout their lives.

Although Agnes had not continued formal studies beyond primary school, she had acquired skills to make her a good spouse. She could cook, bake, sew, manage a household and even play the guitar.¹⁶

Their wedding was celebrated on August 9, 1908, along with the 25th wedding anniversary of Agnes's parents. Relatives, friends, colleagues and former students, some from distant villages, attended the celebration.

Since Friedensruh did not have living quarters for two married teachers, Aron accepted a vacant position at a one-room school with 50 to 60 students in Rueckenau. The salary, 550 rubles per year, was higher than at Friedensruh, but the working conditions were more difficult. They soon settled into the teacherage attached to the school, which consisted of four rooms: kitchen, living room and two bedrooms. The Harmses had given Agnes a large dowry of furniture, linens, dishes and a cow. Since the teacherage had no accommodations for a horse and carriage, the Harmses frequently sent theirs to bring Aron and Agnes home for visits.

Besides offering a better salary, Rueckenau was attractive as the center of Mennonite Brethren Church activities in the Molotschna Colony. The annual conferences and *Bruderberatungen* (brotherhood meetings) were usually held there. Since 1883 the

village boasted a Mennonite Brethren sanctuary seating 600 and church membership was close to 3000 if the affiliated congregations were included. Agnes's parents, the Harmses, were members of the Rueckenau congregation which Aron had joined in 1906 after being baptized by Elder David Schellenberg in the Juschanlee River. Former ministers and teachers liked to retire in Rueckenau which had a home for the aged. Unlike most Mennonite villages, Rueckenau supported education and various other non-agricultural pursuits.¹⁷

Managing 55 to 60 lower grade (1-3) and upper grade (4-6) students was difficult and good organizational skills were necessary. The classes were taught in Russian except for religion, German and music. During the first year of marriage, Agnes helped teach reading and writing in the lower grades. By the end of the sixth year the children were expected to read and write both German and Russian, know a minimum of geography and history, master certain mathematical skills and know most common Bible stories by heart.

Agnes's classroom work helped her overcome homesickness. Her teaching ended, however, in the second year of marriage with the birth of a daughter, Agnes, on October 15, 1909. Daughter Mary was born on December 16, 1910. John, named after his grandfather and both a paternal and a maternal uncle, arrived on August 15, 1912, and Nick on November 11, 1913.

John, usually called Hans, spent his early years in the teacherage, where he was born.¹⁸ Since the kitchen adjoined the classroom, Hans was often tempted to open the door to peek into the classrooms. Once, when the nursemaid, whom Agnes hired to help with four preschoolers, let her eyes stray, Hans's wish to observe the class was cut short by a hand on his neck and a stern admonishment: "*Da ist der kleine Hans — Hans, du wirst Klopf bekommen*" (There he is, the little Hans — Hans you will get a spanking)¹⁹.

Aron and Agnes had a few picture books in the home, gifts from Grandpa Harms, and Agnes often told the children stories. Most of the children's time was spent in play. They considered it a treat to visit the Martens' store next to the school. Their

occasional fighting automatically resulted in *Klopf* (spanking). Aron was a strict father but eventually he tired of lining up the four at the end of the school day to give them their just desserts. He told Agnes it would be more efficacious to administer the punishment right after the incident. Though strict, Aron had a kind heart beneath the gruff exterior and the children's requests were usually made to him rather than to Agnes, who felt many were unnecessary: "*Sie brauchen das doch nicht*" (they don't need it) — to which Aron would reply, "*Lass sie doch*" (let them have it).¹⁹ The children's biggest excitement erupted when Grandpa Harms from Friedensruh sent his beautiful big carriage with plush seats and fringes on top so that Aron, Agnes and the children could come visit.

John had just turned two when Russia declared war on Germany in August, 1914. All healthy men aged 20 to 45 were to be drafted into the army or given alternative service. His father, Aron, was excused for health reasons,²⁰ but his uncles, Johann, Abram and Peter, were drafted. Uncle Abram, a *Sanitaeter* (medical worker), was one of 33 Mennonite men captured by the Germans at the border in December, 1914. He spent the next four years as a prisoner of war. Uncle Johann served in the forestry and medical divisions and Uncle Peter served on a medical train. During the War about 12,000 Mennonite young men were involved in the alternative service program which was paid for by the churches in the colonies. Many Mennonite men were mistreated because they had such a good command of German, the enemy's language.

In November 1914, a government decree prohibited the use of the German language in the press or in public assembly. The next year, 1915, the government enacted several decrees authorizing property liquidation of Russian Germans. Some of the dispossessed Germans from the Volhynia area sought refuge in the Mennonite villages. Rueckenau was one of the villages to receive them. The Mennonites, afraid that they too might lose their property, sent a delegation in 1916 to St. Petersburg to "document their Dutch ancestry. This effort to deny a German background came to be known as the '*Hollaenderei*' of the Mennonites."²¹ Probably a majority of Russian Mennonites were of Dutch origin, but for

generations their cultural and educational ties had been German, and only the threat of the loss of their property elicited a denial of German origins.

The War was hard on village families, especially those left without male help to manage the farms. Aron travelled to Grandpa Toews in Alexanderkrone in both 1915 and 1916 to help harvest the bountiful wheat crops. In 1915 he accompanied women visiting their husbands stationed in Moscow alternative service units.²²

The February 1917 Revolution overthrew Tsar Nicholas II. A Liberal Provisional Government was set up, first by George Lvov and later by Alexander Kerensky. Even though this Government was committed to continuing the war, it advocated a lenient minority policy and an end to property liquidation. These measures reassured the Mennonite colonists.

On November 7 (Gregorian Calendar), the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government and seized power, signalling the beginning of a new era. In March, 1918, Trotsky signed the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, giving up the Ukraine, where most Mennonite colonies were located. The German occupation was welcomed by the colonists who had been subjected, between November of 1917 and April of 1918, to a "reign of terror" by worker soviets who replaced Mennonite local administrators. Often the Soviets were the poor and propertyless, some of them former servants and hired men of Mennonite colonists. Robbery, torture and murder were characteristic of this "dictatorship of the proletariat."²³ The political instability made it difficult for Aron's family to travel from Rueckenau to Friedensruh for Grandma Harms's funeral in December of 1917.²⁴

The German occupation from April to November, 1918, offered peace and security to the colonists. The peace allowed the Mennonite men in the forestry and medical services, including Uncle Johann, Uncle Abram and Uncle Peter, to return to the colonies. A by-product of the occupation was a spirit of militarism which infected many Mennonite youth, who had become enamoured by German military parades and drills. A *Selbstschutz* (Self-defense Unit), dedicated to protecting the villages, was established by

Mennonite young men in May, 1918, despite major church opposition. Even Uncle Henry and Uncle Bernhard Harms joined this unit for a brief period.²⁵ John, only six years old, listened attentively to adult conversations on these current events and their implications for the Mennonite community. A major event for the family was moving from Rueckenau to Grandpa Harms's Friedensruh estate after the 1918 school year ended. Grandpa wanted his daughter, Agnes, to run the household after the death of his wife, and since Aron was able to obtain a teaching position in Friedensruh the move seemed logical. The spacious house was very near the school and there was plenty of play room for the children.

When German troops withdrew from the Ukraine in November of 1918, anarchy followed. The Bolsheviks controlled the areas around Moscow and St. Petersburg but were resisted elsewhere by remnants of the Tsarist or White armies. Nestor Makhno, a leader of anti-white terrorist forces, wrought havoc in the Mennonite colonies. Mary, John's sister, remembers when Makhno rode up to the Harms home to enquire concerning the whereabouts of a young Mennonite man. Grandpa Harms had Agnes (John's mother) serve him tea in the glassed-in veranda.²⁶ It was hard to imagine that Makhno was the leader of a pillaging band that killed hundreds of Mennonite colonists.

Since Makhno had felt aggrieved herding cattle for wealthy Mennonite landowners as a youth, his band wreaked extraordinary violence in the Mennonite colonies. Although the Communists were not as radical as he wished, he joined forces with them in March, 1919, on condition that he and his men could rule the Taurida Province. From July to October, 1919, White armies led by General Deniken drove out the Bolsheviks. During this four-month period of civil strife, some Mennonite villages changed hands as many as twenty times. The horror of the strife was especially real for the Toewses as Uncle Peter and his wife Neta (nee Unruh) were both killed by a grenade which exploded in the Waldheim Village street. Their four preschool children were orphaned. The baby, Justa, died soon after. Frieda remained with the Unruh

grandparents in Waldheim, while Peter and Victor were taken to live with Uncle Abram in Alexanderkrone.

John began his elementary schooling in 1919 in Friedensruh, with Hans Thiessen, Johann Kasdorf and his father as his teachers. His father was especially strict with his own children. Agnes, John's oldest sister, recalls having to stand in the corner for not having memorized "The Feeding of the 5000." On days when the village was under siege, the family spent the time in the basement listening to the artillery bombardment and the fighting on the village street.²⁷ When Grandpa Toews died on December 25, 1919, Aron had to get a special pass from the Reds controlling the village to attend the funeral. For two years troops were quartered in the village and had to be fed and transported on request. The coarse behavior of many of the soldiers, especially their cursing and blaspheming, made a deep impression on John. Sin was not a myth but a reality.

Peace finally came to the Mennonite colonies when the Bolsheviks gained control of the Ukraine at the end of 1920. This, however, did not end the suffering for the colonists. In *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (1975) John makes reference to the book of Revelation when referring to this period: "As in the apocalyptic judgements described in Revelation chapter six, so also in the experience of the Mennonites of Russia the red horse of war was followed by the black horse of famine and the pale horse of pestilence and death."²⁸ Typhus, cholera, malaria and even syphilis spread through the villages in the wake of the troops and the marauding bands. Aron came down with typhus but recovered; the rest of the family was spared.

Famine followed the civil war and the epidemics. Both White and Red Armies requisitioned grain so that by the spring of 1921 there was hardly any grain available for seeding. Most horses and cattle had also been taken by the armies. In addition, in the spring and summer of 1921, the Ukraine suffered a severe drought. There were soon no barking dogs in the villages as dogs and cats were eaten. Young John saw the famine-bloated bodies lying at the side of the road. He was impressed by the uncertainty of life and the certainty of death.

John always deeply appreciated the Mennonite Central Committee, since he felt his life was spared by its work. Formed in July, 1920, the first task of this inter-Mennonite relief agency was to plan a relief program for Mennonites in Russia. Implementing such a program through Russian bureaucratic channels took time and patience but Alvin J. Miller, Director of American Relief, and B.B. Janz, Chairman of the *Verband der Mennoniten in Sueden Russlands* (Union of South Russian Mennonites), were finally able to negotiate an agreement with the Moscow government. In March, 1922, feeding operations began in the Ukraine, and also reached Friedensruh.

The Harms farm became the center for feeding operations in the village, with Aron in charge and his brothers-in-law, Johann and Jacob, his assistants. For the children, Agnes, Mary, John and Nick, this created much excitement. A large kitchen was installed in a building adjoining the house to cook for large numbers of people. Aron also had to prepare a list of those eligible to receive one meal a day at the centre.²⁹ A man with two cows could not be admitted because he could barter one cow for food. The sick, children under fifteen, adults over sixty, and nursing or expectant mothers were given preference, and if there was enough food, other groups were included. Each individual received a large bun baked with American flour, a helping of beans, rice or grits and a twice-weekly cup of cocoa.³⁰ In later years, John still remembered how good the buns tasted. It was much easier to remain attentive in class on a full stomach than on an empty one. The relief kitchen began operations in March, and a few months later Aron was able to devote more time to it since he was relieved of his teaching position. Ministers were no longer allowed to teach in the public schools.

Aron became a full-time preacher, travelling minister and evangelist. After the civil war and famine had receded, there was a great spiritual renewal in the colonies. Aron's memoirs indicate Mennonite "gods" that had come to naught — the large estates and rich farmland had been expropriated and nationalized, the money in bank accounts had become worthless, the beautifully groomed

horses and luxurious family coaches had been requisitioned and never returned, and the elegant clothes been taken by marauding bands.³¹ Now the *raison d'être* of the Mennonites — the deep faith in Christ and the fellowship of the believers — which had receded into the background for so many years, came to the fore again. Evangelists travelled from village to village. There was a resurgence of prayer meetings and Bible conferences. The boundaries between the Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Brethren Church began to blur. They had shared tribulation and suffering; now they shared a deeper appreciation of the Word of God.

Despite unfavourable political conditions, John, an able student, was able to finish the six-year elementary curriculum in five years, thus catching up with his sister, Mary. He readily memorized dates, places, multiplication tables, poems and stories. All subjects were taught in Russian except for German and religious instruction. Peter Braun, in his treatise "The Educational System of the Mennonite Colonies of South Russia," gives an example of the Mennonite village school curriculum:

1. Scripture study (with Mennonite catechism) - 6 hours
2. German language (with grammar, spelling and composition) - 10 hours
3. Arithmetic (including common and decimal fractions and the different methods of calculation) - 5 hours
4. Russian language, reading, exercises in oral and written composition - 8 hours
5. Geography (local, general and national) - 2 hours
6. Singing - 2 ½ hours

This yielded a total of 33 1/3 hours of instruction weekly. Penmanship and drawing were practised during the periods for German and Russian, and world history and natural science were taught in the German and Russian readers.³²

In the spring of 1924 both John and Mary did very well on the *Pruefung*, a thorough examination which determined whether they could read and write accurately in Russian and German, recite the important Bible stories verbatim, answer questions on history and

geography, and perform mathematical computations on the blackboard as well as mentally.

Aron and Agnes were concerned about John's and Mary's further education. Friedensruh did not have a *Zentralschule* (Junior High School), but Alexanderkrone did. Since Aron had been dismissed from teaching and was engaged mainly in preaching, a move to Alexanderkrone, where he had inherited a house (*Nebenhaus*, not the large house) on the family farm, was feasible. Then he would also be able to help his brother, Abram, with the farm work.

Earlier in the winter of 1924 there had been a series of revival meetings in Friedensruh with David Duerksen and John's uncle, Johann Toews. John attended regularly but did not make a definite commitment till three weeks later. On March 12 he approached his father for help. Aron took out his Bible and read Isaiah 53:5, inserting John's name. "He was wounded for John's transgressions ... and with His stripes John is healed."³³ There was no dramatic crisis experience or recanting of terrible misdeeds. There was a personal appropriation of faith and a commitment to be Christ's disciple. In his later ministry, John often cautioned his fellow Mennonite Brethren not to insist on a certain conversion formula. Not everyone who becomes a Christian has a "road to Damascus" experience such as Paul's. John, in a talk simply entitled "My Testimony", credits the civil war and famine with paving the way for such a decision.³⁴ Life is vulnerable, he realized, and he wanted his life to count for God.

When John entered the Alexanderkrone *Zentralschule* in 1924, his teachers were I.J. Regehr (Russian History, Literature, Political Indoctrination); J.I. Regehr (Botany, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, Music), David P. Wiens (Math, Geometry, German) and Mary P. Dick, (Mathematics)³⁵ John was excited by the variety of subjects offered and the access to a larger library at the school. J.I. Regehr remembers him as being a good student and as one to whom the class turned whenever there was a difficult problem.³⁶

These were unsettling times in the colonies. John's father's original reaction to the Kerensky Government had been positive as

it promised the convening of a constituent assembly, civil liberties, amnesty to political prisoners and a democratization of local government. The constituent assembly would determine the new constitution, the ending of the war and the redistribution of land. With the victory of the Bolsheviks in October of 1917, it soon became apparent that there would be little freedom and much economic hardship. Although some thought it might initiate a moderate socialism and restore private property rights, Lenin's New Economic Policy (1921-24) was merely a temporary reprieve. A number of Mennonite leaders began to consider emigration.

In April, 1922, the *Verband der Buerger Hollaendischer Herkunft* (Union of Citizens of Dutch Ancestry) received its charter authorizing it to promote Ukrainian economic reconstruction as well as emigration of the refugees and the landless. B.B. Janz, the elected VBHH Chairman, saw little future for the Mennonites in Russia. For him the past violence, potential russification and assimilation, destruction of previous land tenure, closing of charitable institutions, Communist dogmatism, and the loss of religious freedom made a Mennonite future in Russia impossible.³⁷ However, he tried to facilitate not only exodus but also economic recovery because he realized this was a necessity for the many who remained.

Janz was a frequent visitor in the Aron Toews home. Not only was he a fellow teacher, but Aron's brother Johann was married to Janz's sister Margaret and brother Abram had married Janz's sister Lena.

Since Aron was neither a refugee nor landless, he was not given permission to leave the Ukraine for Paraguay in 1922. He, however, attended meetings for interested emigrants and returned to tell the family about Paraguay's warm attractive climate.³⁸

In 1923, after Abram Nachtigal emigrated to America, Aron became chief minister of the *Lichtfelde Allianz Gemeinde*, a Church established in 1905 "to bring together all true believers who had been separated by the polarization in doctrine and organization of the two main bodies: the Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Brethren Church."³⁹ Ministers and elders from both groups were

involved in its founding. The Church practised open communion and accepted believers who had not been baptized by immersion. When Aron took over the leadership in 1923, the membership of about 400 was dispersed throughout the Molotschna villages. However, the revivals and spiritual renewal movements following the civil war and famine resulted in a great influx of new members. Aron relates in his memoirs that 150 new members were received in 1925-26.⁴⁰ After his 1924 conversion John continued to fellowship with his parents at Lichtfelde. This experience had an enduring effect: throughout his life people considered him, sometimes with suspicion, as belonging to the "left wing" of the Mennonite Brethren, advocating cooperation with other Mennonites. He became a strong advocate of admitting non-immersed members who had been baptized on their confession of faith.

By 1923 Aron was convinced that there was no future for Mennonites in Russia. His friend, B.B. Janz, confirmed this and confided that his dealings with the new Bolshevik regime in Kharkov and Moscow did not give him much hope for the future. However, he realized that many Mennonites would stay and, therefore, every effort should be made to further the economic reconstruction of the colonies. Emigration papers took time to acquire for there were papers to fill out at the village (Alexanderkrone), volost (Halbstadt), region (Melitopol), and republic (Alexandrovsk) if passports were to be issued. Aron wrote that sometimes a person had to offer a gift of butter, ham or even rubles to facilitate the process. A favorite official word was *sawtra-zabmpa* (tomorrow). Because Aron had been openly critical of Bolshevik policies, he feared that his passport would not arrive. Agnes's came first and three months later Aron's passport finally appeared. Canada, not Paraguay, was now the destination of those emigrating, and B.B. Janz helped them obtain both an entry visa and the permission of the Canadian Pacific Railway to travel on partial credit. The Aron Toews family received travel credit of \$1200 to be repaid in Canada.

Those wishing to emigrate were to be examined by a Canadian doctor sent to the colonies and were required to pass rigid Canadian standards. Doctor Drury finally arrived in Molotschna in mid-May 1926.⁴¹ Fortunately Aron, Agnes and the four children were declared medically fit. War, famine and disease had ravaged the colonies and many persons did not pass the exam the first time. Trachoma and tuberculosis were the two prevalent reasons for failing the exam. Several of John's cousins, children of Uncle Jacob Toews, were diagnosed as having tuberculosis, and so Jacob was not eligible to emigrate. Aron was the first of the Toews family to leave, but Abram and Johann, brothers-in-law of B.B. Janz, and their families, followed in late 1926. Of the Harms family, Agnes was the only one to leave. Farewells were not easy. Her sister Agatha's husband was optimistic about the future and felt this was the time to acquire land and build up one's capital assets.

For John and his siblings, preparations for an auction and a long train and ship journey were exciting. Geography and history were his favorite subjects and so he plotted their journey on the map. He had also read Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and wondered if they would encounter Indians in the new land.⁴³ His mother was more concerned with determining what items should be taken along and what left behind. Large lined baskets, woven by local Russian weavers were the main items of luggage. One was packed with roasted *Zwieback* and farmer sausage to sustain the family on the journey. The others contained clothes, books and personal items; there was no room for furniture or heirlooms.

John wrote up handbills announcing the auction for May 17, 1926. The Russian ruble had finally stabilized somewhat and most of the large items sold readily. Some young Mennonite farmers saw these sales and auctions as golden opportunities to buy equipment cheaply. The New Economic Policy instituted in 1924 to replace wartime communism had eased life somewhat and many felt this was not the time to leave. Aron hid the money from the auction in a canvas moneybelt strapped to his waist, until the time for departure. On May 24, 1926, Aron visited the Tiege VBHH Office

and said farewell to B.B. Janz. Ascension Day, May 25, the day before departure, was filled with poignant farewells at the church and among relatives. On Monday morning, May 26, all the trunks, baskets and sacks were packed into a wooden horse-drawn wagon. Uncle Gerhard Harms, accompanied by John and Nick, rode the wagon while Aron and Agnes and the two girls rode in the carriage with Abram and Agatha Fast. At the Melitopol station, they boarded the train enroute from the Crimea to Moscow. John and his siblings didn't realize how difficult it was for their parents to say farewell to relatives and friends they would never see again. This was the beginning of a new adventure for John, who had never been more than 40 or 50 miles from home to visit relatives. Now he was on a journey that would traverse thousands of miles and take him to a new country.

John's strong sense of Mennonite peoplehood in later years had its roots in the Russian experience. He had been a part of a unique religious and ethnic community, living in villages separated from the surrounding Slavic society. Though he later lived in cities and travelled on various continents, a part of him was always the Russian Mennonite immigrant. The material affluence and cultural and educational achievements of the Russian Mennonite community of the early twentieth century were swept away by the political events of his childhood. Nevertheless, John was convinced that the educational, medical and welfare institutions had strengthened the Mennonite sense of community. His father, and later John himself, became strong advocates of Mennonite institutions in Canada.

Although his grandparents and parents were members of the Mennonite Brethren Church which emphasised separation and nonconformity, his father had spent some of the best years of his life serving the Lichtfelde Allianz Church as chief minister. A stress on inner piety and evangelism rather than on externalities marked that church, which promoted Bible conferences throughout the Mennonite constituency. John retained some of the legalism of the Mennonite Brethren in the realm of ethics, though he mellowed with time, but the Lichtfelde influence of inter-Mennonite cooperation, inner piety and missions remained dominant in his life.

2

New Beginnings

John's parents heaved a sigh of relief at the sight of Latvian officials who replaced Soviet soldiers at the border. In Riga officials greeted them and explained that before going on to Libau and boarding the ship, they would once more have to be examined in the emigrant camp which had been set up. All their clothes and linens were thoroughly disinfected. John and Nick were anxious to see the Baltic Sea and the ship on which they were to sail, the S.S. *Boltava*. Finally they were allowed to board and set sail for England. Enroute, the ship stopped at Danzig where John and the family encountered Low-German speaking Mennonites.¹ Then on they went through the Kiel Canal to the North Sea and the Thames estuary. Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) officials were present in London to help them get off the ship and transfer their belongings to a train which took them to the port of Southampton. There the family was examined once more and much to their dismay the doctor said Agnes, only 16, would have to remain at the Atlantic Park inspection and detention Center till a boil cleared up. The rest of the family, however, had to proceed to make room for new families continually arriving.

The British luxury liner, *Empress of Scotland* (formerly the *Kaiser Wilhelm*), acquired by England as part of her war bounty, became the family's home for the Atlantic passage. Aron and the boys managed the voyage fairly well and John boasted he had not missed a meal. What a treat to have dinner in the dining room where the waiter brought the menu with several options.

Sometimes the boys used sign language with the waiter to find out whether the menu included chicken, fish, soup, sandwiches, etc. Nick enjoyed mimicking and picked up several English phrases. Mother and Mary, however, spent most of the journey in a prone position as a consequence of sea sickness. All on board were happy at the first sight of the new land, the St. Lawrence banks. John had read about the early Canadian settlements and the fortress where Wolfe and Montcalm fought the decisive battle of the Plains of Abraham just outside Quebec City. *The Empress of Scotland* docked at Quebec City on June 19, 1926. As the passengers disembarked, each was given a German New Testament by the Red Cross, as a reminder that they were in a new environment, far from Soviet control. CPR officials guided the new immigrants to the large railway station, where they boarded the car which would take them across the country to their destination.

For a number of days John wondered what Canada would be like. The CPR crossed the northern Ontario Canadian Shield, composed of Precambrian rock and scrub vegetation, and the sparsely populated tundra, a desolate area rich in minerals. John couldn't imagine living there; it was what he imagined Siberia to be like, not Canada. Eventually the train arrived in Winnipeg. Here Russian Mennonites welcomed them and took them to Eaton's — a consumer's heaven for youngsters from a Ukrainian village.

On the train trip between Winnipeg and Saskatoon the landscape appeared more familiar. The vast, treeless stretches of prairie resembled their Ukrainian home. In Saskatoon they were to transfer to a Canadian National Railway train. When no Mennonite appeared to assist them, a Russian minister from Blaine Lake, Saskatchewan, took them to the terminal and gave each a Canadian dollar.² At the terminal they were greeted by David Toews, Elder of the Rosenort Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan, and chairman of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, who had helped make their dreams of starting a new life in Canada possible.³

The family's destination was Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, where Aron's Rueckenau friend, Rev. Jacob G. Thiessen, welcomed them.

John and Nick were left at the station to guard the meager possessions till a boxwagon came to get them, but the others rode in an old Ford to the Thiessen home. John's vision of the land of unlimited possibilities was shattered on the Dalmeny farm.⁴ For the next seven months he and his father helped clear land for cultivation. It was strenuous labor to dig up roots and burn them. John received 50 cents a day and his father \$1.50. He was very happy when a Mennonite landlord gave him a cap to ward off the elements and subsequently disillusioned when that landlord deducted the cost from his week's earnings, leaving him almost nothing.

John and Nick also attended the local public school, but found it humiliating to be placed with seven-year-olds who mimicked them and poked fun when they were forced to recite at the front of the class. These experiences instilled in John a determination to prove his worth and so he completed six grades in six months.⁵

For the first ten days they lived with their friends, the Thiessens, and then moved into an old rented house which they shared with another family. The cold winter winds seemed to blow through every crack and some mornings Agnes found the water frozen on the kitchen stove. In the Molotschna they had never experienced temperatures of minus 30-40 degrees Fahrenheit. Young Agnes's arrival in Dalmeny from Southhampton, two weeks after the rest of the family, was a joyful occasion.

Soon after arriving in Dalmeny, Aron made contact with other immigrants looking for farmland. He realized it would be almost impossible to obtain a teaching certificate because of the language barrier, so farming was virtually his only option. After several unsuccessful forays to various parts of Saskatchewan, he heard through the Mennonite Land Settlement Board about the large 13,000 acre George Lane ranch⁶ in southern Alberta, at Namaka, about forty miles east of Calgary, which was to be divided and sold to immigrants in 320 acre allotments. After surveying the situation early in 1927, Aron decided to throw in his lot with the 35 other families buying the land.

The Lane ranch had been rented out in 1925-26 and farmed communally. Though operating at a loss in 1924, it showed a profit

of \$17,800 in 1926. The principals of the Dominion Bank, owners of the ranch, thought it would be to their advantage to sell the land and thus collect the interest on the mortgage. The ranch had previously been divided into three large farms (referred to as No. 1, No. 2, and No. 3) which were now to be subdivided.⁷ Each farmer drew a lot and Aron's was 320 acres on the northern edge of the No. 2 farm at an average cost per acre of \$41.60. Some farmers would have preferred a different land distribution, but they were forced to conform to the sectional survey pattern. Part of the settlement stipulated that each year one-half of the crop should go to pay the principal and interest.⁸

Aron had just turned 43 when he began homesteading on the bald Canadian prairie. Although each farmer had his own enterprise, all the farmers were collectively obligated. Henry C. Klassen states, "All the settlers of a unit had to guarantee that they would pay for their farms before anyone in the unit would receive his land."⁹ The company, realizing how few funds the settlers had, advanced money for seed grains, livestock and machinery the first year. When the Toews family arrived in Namaka in February, 1927, they lived several months in a converted granary before moving onto the newly-acquired land.

The beginning was difficult. To improve the cash flow Agnes worked in a rich farmer's home. John, Nick, Mary and their mother had to help with digging the cellar and well and building a cattle shelter. The little three-room house Aron bought had to be pulled by sixteen horses to the new site. Some of the land needed to be broken with the steam-powered breaking machine. Other farmers from the unit helped with seeding and harvesting. The first crop in 1927 was a bumper crop. Unfortunately, there were only two steam threshing outfits for the whole community and so not all the grain was harvested before the first snow on November 6.¹⁰ Some had to be harvested the next April; in the meantime the mice and the roving bands of cattle and horses from the nearby Blackfoot Indian reservation did much damage.

John quickly assumed a lot of the responsibility for the farming operation as Aron did not like to work with horses. The seeding and harvesting were largely left to his discretion. Aron preferred

planting the shelter belt and gardening. The climate was not the moderate climate with plentiful rainfall of southern Russia. Pioneers had to cope with semiarid conditions, devastating hailstorms, blinding dust storms and rigorous winters.

John attended school that first winter on the farm till seeding time. Optimistically, the family planted the 1928 crop but in early August a hailstorm devastated all their fields; Aron writes that there was nothing left to thresh.¹¹ John and other farmers who had suffered a similar fate were hired by more fortunate farmers to help with harvesting. Thus the Toews family made enough money to keep body and soul together for another year.

On August 10, 1929, a big hailstorm dashed all hopes for any crop that fall. John did, however, go back to the one-room school to complete his grade eight.

Early in 1930 John and eleven other Mennonite young men joined a logging outfit, 18 miles west of the Turner Valley oilfields, in order to make some extra money. The manager wanted them to cut down the trees and then haul them down to the mill where they would be sawn into lumber. Their payment would be one-sixth of the lumber cut after three months. Since there were no accommodations at the site when they arrived, they spent the first day erecting their own log cabin. John later recalled that he could see the stars through the cracks and that his hair was full of snow by morning. The men fulfilled their part of the contract by bringing the logs down to the mill, but the manager reneged on his promise. Due to the stock market crash in the fall of 1929, the bottom had dropped out of the lumber market. For three months of labour John had no earnings and had not even made up the \$80 invested in special logging clothes and a bobsled. In March he returned empty-handed to Namaka to begin seeding.¹²

Not long after the Toews arrived in Namaka in 1927, an Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church, composed of thirty former members of the Allianz Church in Russia, was organized with Aron Toews as leader. John was baptized and accepted into the fellowship on August 4, 1929; Nettie Willms, who later became his wife, was baptized at the same time. At first the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren and the General Conference Mennonites met

jointly in the schoolhouse, but in the fall of 1932 the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren decided to build a church building on land donated by John's father.¹³

After two years of complete devastation by the hail, the Toewses wondered whether pioneer farming on the Alberta prairie was really their calling. They were indeed grateful that they had been fortunate enough to leave Russia, for many relatives were now in concentration camps in Siberia or the Russian far north. But there must be an easier life. Eleven of the families at Namaka moved on, having become disheartened with crop losses, mortgage payments and *Reiseschuld* (travel debt). Aron, despite crop losses, paid back the last part of his travel debt, a sum totalling \$1200 plus interest, in the fall of 1929.

The depression struck Canada with a vengeance. Suddenly there were no markets for grain, pulp, paper and metals — Canada's main exports. The price of wheat fell from \$1.60 a bushel in 1929 to 38 cents, more than two years later. In addition to the market collapse, devastating drought destroyed millions of wheat-growing acres in western Canada. The new immigrants, who had just survived revolution and famine in Russia, now faced another bitter struggle for survival in the new land. But they had learned endurance and this lesson stood them in good stead. They worked hard and would not give up.

The steady dry winds in the spring of 1930 sucked up the moisture and blew much of the topsoil away so that the 1930 crop was very small. Despite the depressed economic situation, Aron encouraged John to enrol in the Coaldale Bible School where Uncle Johann Toews and Abram Schierling were teaching. John, who needed no prodding, arrived in Coaldale, Alberta in October 1930, ready to begin his studies. The Bible School, founded the previous year, had begun in a private home. By the fall of 1930 it had moved to larger quarters in the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church. The purpose of the school was to strengthen young people in regard to fundamental scriptural doctrines and to train them for work as Sunday School teachers and church youth and choir workers.

The first Mennonite Brethren Bible School in Canada had been launched as early as 1913, in Herbert, by J.F. Harms. In 1925 A.H. Unruh had founded the Pniel Bible School in Winkler. These Bible Schools reflected the deep interest of Canadian Mennonite Brethren in Bible knowledge.

John acquired the art of taking notes, as students then did not possess texts. In the case of Professor Schierling's classes this lack presented little problem since he was systematic and well-organized, and often wrote notes in flowing penmanship on the blackboard. In prophecy classes he used large detailed charts to explain future events. The classes of *Onkel* Toews, as he was affectionately called, presented more of a problem because he wanted students to look up and pay attention while he spoke and not be concerned about notes.

Most of the students were newly-arrived immigrants. A very few had completed high school but most of them had completed only grade seven or eight. The Bible School offered an opportunity to socialize with other young people in their newly-adopted country in a legitimate, approved setting. Social rules of conduct, however, were very strict. In classes boys occupied the front seats, as it was assumed that if girls sat in front, they would distract the boys. There was much memory work in the courses and the students knew biblical facts when they had completed the course. They also practised the art of storytelling and preached sample sermons. In one of Professor Schierling's classes students were given a sermon topic and ten minutes to organize their material. John volunteered to preach the first sermon on "The Good Shepherd" (John 10). His effort had contained many flaws and all the students in the class became convinced that preparing a sermon required much hard work. A five-month Bible School program made it possible for those to attend who were involved in grain and cattle farming. By the end of April they had to seed new crops. The year 1931 was marked by extreme drought, hot winds, withered crops and a poor harvest. The depression was settling in; grain prices dropped, drought burned most of the wheat area, and hot spring winds blew away topsoil. Many dreams were lost in these dust storms.

However, the sharing of common hardships created a bond of community among the settlers and their deep faith in God kept them from despair. John remained undaunted in his goal to continue his studies. The only cash income on his parents's Namaka farm came from the cream, eggs, pigs and cattle sold in Calgary, forty miles away. Aron nevertheless felt that John's attendance at Bible School was worth the sacrifices they might have to make as a family.

In the fall of 1931 Daniel Fast, a public school teacher from Saskatchewan, became the third faculty member at the Coaldale Bible School. He was specifically hired to teach English. The church committee running the school realized that the largely immigrant population would need to understand English well if they eventually wanted to be an integral part of Canadian society. John, in the meantime, was beginning to take a special interest in a fellow student, Nettie Willms.¹⁴ Nettie, an orphan, had emigrated with her brother, John, and sisters, Marie (Mrs. Aron Wall), Gertrude (later Mrs. Aron Baerg) and Katie (later Mrs. George Huebert). She was good-looking and, while working as housekeeper for a Calgary doctor, acquired fashionable clothes. She was a skilled seven-string guitar player, and often sang duets with Hilda Rempel (later Mrs. Nick Langeman) at Bible School programs.

John frequently spent weekends at Uncle Johann's. His cousin Lydia recalls that she would wash his clothes while he milked the cows allotted to her.¹⁵ On one occasion he asked his uncle for an appraisal of Nettie. He replied that though she was an orphan, she had a good head on her shoulders and was an excellent student. Dating was not permitted, but occasionally John and Nettie sang in mixed quartets. John tried his hand at conducting as well as singing. The verdict after he had conducted the singers was "*zu lebhaftes Tempo*" (the tempo was too lively).

Rain finally appeared in spring, 1932, and paved the way for a bumper crop. It was heartbreaking to have to sell it at 28 cents a bushel. John hesitated slightly about going back for a third year since only those seriously interested in the ministry usually took the final year, but he felt this was where he belonged. During the 1932

Christmas holidays he was given his first preaching assignment. He travelled to Staveland, Alberta, with a Bible School quartet. Here an older brother in the church asked him his age. When he replied, "twenty", the brother commented that Christ had waited till he was thirty to begin his ministry.¹⁶

At the end of March, 1933, John graduated from Bible School. Nettie also graduated from the two-year course. On the night that she returned to her position in Calgary, Mary, John's sister, was also at the station at Strengmuir, departing for Calgary. John, his sister's chauffeur, asked Nettie to go for a walk while they waited for the train. When he declared that his intentions were serious, she responded positively, and so began their courtship. Church regulations and community feeling discouraged intensive courtship and three weeks was considered an average engagement period. Aron cautioned John not to cause any offence since he was active in youth work in the local congregation. The courtship therefore progressed largely through correspondence and occasional brief visits.

The year 1933 was another year of economic disaster. The Toewses had a complete crop failure. Never one to mope or remain idle, John decided to complete his grade nine by correspondence. On Sundays he was active in Sunday School and youth work and Aron gave him occasional opportunities to preach. By the spring of 1934 he was preaching about once a month.

John's thoughts often strayed to dreams of further study. At Coaldale the biblical studies were offered in German. In order to serve as a Christian worker in Canada, John realized he would have to be fluent in English. He was particularly interested in learning theological terminology in English. He had heard of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago but his finances would not permit such a venture.

In Calgary the Prophetic Bible Institute, started by William Aberhart in 1925, trained young people as church workers and evangelists within the framework of a literal approach to biblical interpretation. It was part of the fundamentalist movement and reacted to what it referred to as modernism, higher criticism and skepticism. Aberhart, the founder, admired Dwight L. Moody and

had taken a C.I. Scofield correspondence course. His views of dispensationalism and the premillennial rapture of the church were significantly influenced by Scofield. Scofield divided human history into seven cycles or dispensations (innocence, conscience, human government, prophets, law, grace and kingdom), each beginning with a new covenant and ending in judgment. In his scheme, God's redemptive activity was cyclical rather than linear — a repetition of a pattern rather than the fulfillment of a purpose.

In the fall of 1934 John enrolled at the Prophetic Bible Institute. Not only would he be able to study the Bible in English, but he would also be able to see Nettie more regularly. His teachers were William Aberhart, Ernest C. Manning (Aberhart's successor and Alberta's premier from 1943-1968), and Cyril Hutchinson. Aberhart, the Principal of the school, was a dynamic teacher who presented his arguments dramatically. He especially enjoyed teaching the prophetic books, which offered opportunities to elaborate on Scofield's teachings on the dispensations. Although John performed well on the tests, he had his doubts about the Word of Truth, divided so neatly, particularly when the Sermon on the Mount was relegated to the future "Dispensation of the Kingdom." Aberhart's Sunday afternoon Bible classes, held in the large school auditorium, and radio broadcasts were very popular at this time. His staff claimed he had 350,000 listeners tuned in to the broadcasts. John and Nettie spent many Sunday afternoons listening to what some critics have referred to as a mix of religion and entertainment. One saying John attributed to Aberhart was that "God does not pickle his saints, He preserves them."

Later, during the spring of 1935, Aberhart formed the Social Credit Party and John noted that students became very much aware of politics. The radio sermons increasingly combined prophecy and Social Credit doctrine. Aberhart saw his concern about the physical needs of individuals as a logical extension of his spiritual concern. Monetary reform, he said, was needed. He was definitely not an adherent of the Social Gospel, but some fundamentalists nevertheless criticized him for mixing religion and politics. When he realized that the Liberals, Conservatives, and United Farmers Party of Alberta rejected his Social Credit ideas, he formed his own

party. The Sunday afternoon broadcasts were a major factor in his campaign.¹⁷

The distressed rural population needed hope in the midst of the great economic depression and here was Aberhart, a religious leader they trusted, who promised them a new political deal and an end to destitution and poverty. The leader of the United Farmers of Alberta, Premier Brownlee, had resigned after a much publicized trial for the alleged seduction of his secretary. This occurred in the wake of a scandal involving the divorce of another cabinet minister. R.G. Reid, Provincial Treasurer and Minister of Municipal Affairs, succeeded Brownlee in July of 1934. The province's political, social and economic climate was ready for a change.¹⁸

Social Credit economic ideas were those of British monetary reformer C.H. Douglas, interpreted for Alberta by Aberhart. Douglas proposed state control of money and credit, removing it from the manipulation of private bankers. He also referred to a just price and a national dividend. Aberhart asserted that if such principles were applied, all Albertans would receive a monthly payment of \$25 as a dividend from the province's productive capacity.¹⁹

John never became an ardent Social Credit supporter despite his ties to the founders of the Party,²⁰ nor was he convinced that the Christian could make his best contribution in the political arena. He did appreciate Aberhart's concern for physical as well as spiritual needs, however, and this was to become a major emphasis in his future ministry.

Uppermost in John's mind in 1935, were plans for his marriage to Nettie. In August a severe hailstorm devastated the crop. There was not a penny of insurance because private companies had refused to assume the risk of insurance. John was in a dilemma. How could he ask Nettie to share his life if he had no financial assets? He wrote to Nettie explaining his predicament, and she replied that postponement was not desirable — it might have the tragic results of a sinner's postponement of his conversion.²¹ She said she had \$250 in savings and was quite willing to share any hardships they would face.

In later years, when John was in the limelight, many failed to realize Nettie's contributions. She was not easily disheartened or discouraged. After emigrating to Canada, she had taken a job in Calgary to help pay the travel debt and also to help her brother, John, pay off farm debts. Dr. Francis, her employer, was so impressed with her determination to get biblical training that he allowed her to take two winters off to study at the Coaldale Bible School. Her skills as a cook were well-known, and the doctor's friends sometimes requested Nettie's rolls or pies. She thoroughly enjoyed Bible School and was an excellent student as well as a good singer. If times had been different, she would have followed her dream of becoming a registered nurse. She was outspoken in the home, not always agreeing with John on issues, although supporting him publicly. She was a true helpmeet who provided a stable home setting and a sensitivity to the needs of others. Although labelled a "city" girl, she often milked seven cows before breakfast at a pace rivalling that of any "country" girl. John and Nettie were publicly engaged in September of 1935 and married on November 9 during a raging blizzard. Many roads were closed and the wedding party arrived at the church in a bobsled. John's father officiated, and they began their marriage with a united public prayer. John often remarked in later years that the stormy wedding day was not indicative of their married life.

For almost a year they lived with John's parents in the *Anbau* (addition to the house). Since John's mother was not very well that year, Nettie's help in the house was greatly appreciated. In the fall of 1936 they moved to a rented farm across the road from his parents. The house needed cleaning and disinfecting but it was pleasant for them to be on their own for the first time. Thoughts of further schooling were still in John's mind as he and Nettie started raising turkeys to make a little extra "school money." Farming, they had discovered, was a hazardous occupation and one could end the year with nothing if one depended solely on the grain harvest. The profit from cream, eggs, pies and calves taken to market in Calgary sustained many of the Namaka farmers. Also,

each farm had a large vegetable garden and all the vegetables for the whole year were canned in summer.

Both John and Nettie were active in the Namaka EMB Sunday school and choir. John also took a Moody Bible Institute correspondence course entitled "Great Epochs of Sacred History." For a young couple there was not much diversion or entertainment possible on an isolated farm in the midst of the depression. They read books together or John read aloud while Nettie knitted (a habit they returned to when the children had left home). A travel book, *From Pole to Pole*, was the first book they enjoyed in this fashion.²⁰ The sewing circle was another diversion; since most of the women didn't drive, the men usually stayed for the afternoon as well, making it a social event for the whole family.

The year 1937 brought no relief for southern Alberta. The hot dry weather induced soil drifting. John spread straw over his grain fields and since the straw helped preserve the moisture, in the fall his fields yielded three times more per acre than those of his neighbors. A plague of voracious, marauding grasshoppers almost destroyed the fields in June, but John obtained 700 pounds of poison which he and Nettie mixed with sawdust and placed in ditches and trenches around the fields, and so saved the crop.²³

Neither the hot winds which unleashed the drought that withered the crops, nor the devastating grasshopper plagues, nor the harsh cold winters on an isolated farm caused John and Nettie to leave. They had coped with adversity before and had found sources of strength they did not know they had. Throughout this time John had a dream which Nettie shared — a dream of continuing his studies for further Christian service. The fact that the doctor had been skeptical about their having children caused family members to encourage their study plans.²⁴

The period from 1927 to 1937 was a time of maturation for John. The years of drought, depression and economic insecurity were years of spiritual growth, testing and the search for identity. The general outlines of his future vocation were evident but he realized his gifts needed training and development. Son John refers to this period of his father's life in the 1979 obituary: "For members

of our own somewhat pampered generation the energy and optimism with which father attacked, overcame or simply ignored economic hardship and courted mother, set up a family and pursued his education, seem quite incredible."

Formative Years : 1937-1947

John corresponded with both Moody Bible Institute and Tabor College in the spring of 1937, and also began work on his and Nettie's U.S. visas. A visit by missionary J.H. Lohrenz, who had received his training at Tabor, helped him to decide in favor of that institution. The American Consul in Calgary was not convinced that their financial resources were adequate and the papers were not forthcoming until John's father signed a paper that he would be responsible for any debts incurred. Aron had secretly hoped that he and his two sons could farm together in the same community and work in the church together, but he did not discourage John's dream of getting an education.

At the end of September, 1937, John and Nettie had an auction sale which netted \$50, and on October 2 they left for Hillsboro, Kansas, via Coaldale. In Coaldale they attended the wedding of John's cousin, Jake Toews, and Lena Schultz. It was an opportunity to say farewell to relatives as well as many former Bible School classmates. From there they left on their new venture by train via Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, North Portal, North Dakota, Minneapolis and Kansas City, arriving in Hillsboro, a small town of 2000, on a bright sunny afternoon in early October. The Marion County Fair was in full swing and to John the town appeared an unlikely Mennonite mecca.

Classes had begun several weeks earlier for 240 students, and housing was scarce. Eventually, with the help of teacher Henry Toews, they rented a room from Justina Nikkel, P.C. Hiebert's sister-in-law. The quarters had neither heat nor electricity but the

cost was only four dollars a month. They took baths at the college gym and washed clothes in a tub with a scrub board. The Rev. J.W. Vogt was helpful with their settling in and, in conversation with John, discovered a budding minister who was bilingual. In his diary John noted that on his first Saturday night in Hillsboro he was asked by Vogt to speak at two different places on the following day. He accepted, but preached the same sermon at the sanitarium and at the old folks' home.

John enrolled in Civics, American History, Public Speaking and English, and Nettie in Matthew and Fundamentals of Faith. Since John had not completed high school, his courses included some in the Academy and some in the Bible Department. In order to move ahead quickly, he took classes in English III and worked on I and II on his own; he also wrote German I, II and III in one semester. There were few idle moments for him during this year.

One of the first persons John and Nettie visited was J.F. Harms, then 82, a cousin of John's grandfather, who had been instrumental in starting the Herbert Bible School and had been active in numerous Conference ventures throughout his life. John and J.F. Harms quickly established rapport and spent many happy hours together during the next three years. John said Harms was of "*echtem schroten Korn*" (sterling character).¹ A lonely, old man with a rich background of experience and an eager, young man interested in working for the church had much to offer each other. John and Nettie soon discovered the Jacob Harmses as well (Jacob was a cousin of his mother), and shared many meals with them.

Tabor College, founded in 1908 by the Tabor College School Association, became a Mennonite Brethren Conference school in 1935, with A.E. Janzen as its new President. Janzen saw it as his task to develop Tabor as a school of "academic excellence with a spiritual plus."² Its purpose was to prepare young people to promote the kingdom. Since this was the only Mennonite Brethren Conference school in North America, its special mandate was to uphold and transmit values dear to MB people. In 1930-31 it had been granted four-year accreditation, but when it closed in 1934-35, this accreditation was lost and the school began again as a junior

college with a strong Bible department. Most of the students, as well as professors, came from farming and middle-class families in Kansas and surrounding states, although there were always a few students from Canada. Those who didn't become church leaders and missionaries often became prosperous farmers, school teachers, doctors and a few among them even professors. Most students worked hard, for a college education was not something taken for granted in the thirties. Few students attended simply for the social life which in those years was circumscribed by strict parameters. Class and social functions, often consisting of picnics or hikes, were restricted to weekends and had to be concluded by 10 p.m. The theatre, tobacco, dancing and liquor were all taboo.³ The campus flavor was distinctly evangelical, although students were not required to sign a statement of faith. The school was viewed *en loco parentis* and school rules were enforced. In his report to the Mennonite Brethren General Conference in 1939, A.E. Janzen stated: "In this day of conflicting world philosophies, conflicting theories, "isms," moral laxity and irreverence for all that is sacred, we feel constrained to disseminate knowledge, build character and maintain faith in man and God."⁴

Though there may not have been the same freedom of inquiry at Tabor as existed at a state university, neither was there as much indoctrination as some of the Conference constituents wanted. For John and most of his colleagues, the Tabor years were years of intellectual growth and exposure to new ideas and philosophies within the Christian context. H.W. Lohrenz, trained both as a scientist and theologian, was Dean of the Bible Department during John's years at Tabor. Lohrenz was not flamboyant but very methodical in his lectures, and usually put his outlines on the board. In the Conference he was a leader who could pull things together and give direction. He believed in the brotherhood and this fact was evident in his teaching. P.R. Lange and H.F. Toews also taught Bible courses. Dr. Lange was particularly noted for his oratory and pulpit techniques. Many of John's colleagues at Tabor later entered the ministry: Dan Friesen, Waldo Wiebe, Frank Bushman, Herman Warkentin, Bill Neufeld, Julius Kasper, Roland Wiens, Chester

Fast, George Pries and Jack Adrian. The Mennonite Brethren had no seminary and Tabor College offered the most advanced Biblical training possible in Mennonite Brethren institutions.⁵

The annual Bible Conferences were school highlights with such invited speakers as J.G. Wiens, William Bestvater, A.H. Unruh and J.D. Hofer. Occasionally Unruh taught Bible during the spring semester, after the Winkler School year had ended, and John really enjoyed his classes.

During his first year, John, who previously had finished his grade nine by correspondence, completed his high school work and also took several Bible courses. His English load was especially heavy with 18 book reports as well as other assignments to hand in. Nettie to this day remembers some of the books she read in order to help him with his assignments. Fortunately, he was able to write the German I, II, and III exams without any problems in the first semester. A heavy academic load, with frequent preaching assignments in both German and English, made his life hectic. His economic situation also compelled him to seek any job around the college: painting, oiling floors, milking the cows or shovelling professors's sidewalks. Since he was interested in how American Mennonites conducted their youth activities, he attended as many local and church events as possible — choir programs, plays, etc. He knew he would eventually assume some kind of youth leadership role in Canada, and Canadian Mennonite Brethren were looking for models appropriate to their new cultural setting. He was also a member of the German Club, Y.M.C.A. and Science Club.

The big event of the hot summer of 1938 was the birth of Elfrieda, on July 22, at the Hillsboro Hospital. Because the doctors had been skeptical about the possibilities of their having children, her arrival was greeted with a special thankfulness. John attended the labour and delivery, since the progressive doctor wished to let father know what women suffered in giving birth. John was duly impressed and spoke respectfully of the labour of women many years later. One room now seemed inadequate and Justina Nikkel let them rent another room, and also had electricity installed. John spent the summer painting for the college and helping farmers in the Hillsboro area. Just after Nettie and Elfrieda came home from

the hospital, John had to go to St. Louis for visa renewal. Nettie still remembers how H.W. Lohrenz paid her a visit during those days and brought over some noodle soup.

Toward the end of the summer John was offered the Tampa church pastorate. When both A.E. Janzen and H.W. Lohrenz encouraged him to take the position, he acquiesced.⁶ Since Tampa was located 20 miles from Hillsboro, the purchase of a car was necessary, the cost of which would, he hoped, be offset by the pastoral remuneration. He purchased a Model A Ford for ninety dollars. Tampa church members were mainly of a Schwaebish-German background, and the church was in a period of language transition with morning services in German and evening services in English. Since John was bilingual, he was in a position to build bridges between young and old — those who desired change and those who wanted conditions to remain the same. The parishioners were warm and friendly and often gave John and Nettie gifts consisting of vegetables, fruit or poultry.

John enrolled for the Bachelor of Theology course in the fall of 1938. He enjoyed Greek, but when the only other student taking the class did not return the following year, the class was discontinued, much to John's disappointment.⁷

The Mountain Lake, Minnesota church had a Bible Conference each Thanksgiving, and in 1937 John was asked, together with Waldo Wiebe and Dan Friesen, to serve as speaker. His gift of preaching was being confirmed in the wider constituency. The experience was taxing but enjoyable, and 43 years later Dan Friesen was able to recapitulate to the author one of the sermons John had preached at the Conference.⁸

Hospitality had always been a trait of the Aron Toews home and John's mother had the gift of putting strangers at ease. John and Nettie determined that this trait should also characterize their home. While studying at Tabor, though living in cramped quarters, they frequently entertained guests, sometimes with apple boxes for chairs. Since their budget was extremely limited, Nettie became very adept at preparing omelets. A.H. Unruh, B.B. Janz, H.H. Janzen, J.J. Wiens, H.R. Harms and Cornelius Krahn were all dinner guests at one time or another, and J.F. Harms was a frequent

visitor. Only once was Nettie upset at having company. John had invited the director of the Henderson Children's Home over and had asked the college secretary to let Nettie know. She inadvertently had failed to do so and Nettie was shocked when John walked in the door with a visitor. The menu was potato soup; since there was no meat in the house, she fried a few eggs as well. Later that day she made it clear to John that this must not happen again; for her it was a most embarrassing moment.⁹

In order to improve his speaking voice, John enrolled for nine voice lessons with Professor Richert. He had heard many preachers and noticed that many had problems with voice modulation. The breathing and articulation techniques he acquired stood him in good stead. The song he chose for his chapel debut, April 25, 1939, was entitled "My Bible and I." In case he should ever have to conduct a choir, he also took a class in conducting.¹⁰

In order to meet visa requirements, John and Nettie had to return to Canada for the summer of 1939. The outlook for jobs seemed most promising in Ontario where Nettie's sister, Marie (Mrs. Aron Wall), lived. That summer John cut asparagus and hauled manure for \$1.75 a day, while Nettie picked strawberries and thinned peaches. They rented a small, second floor room, and Nettie and her sister Katie took turns working so there would be someone to look after Elfrieda and the two Huebert boys, Helmut and Walter. Interspersed with the manual work were opportunities for John to preach in Vineland as well as in Kitchener.¹¹

September 1, the day Germany invaded Poland, was John's last day of work. When England declared war on September 3, he feared they might not be able to return to the U.S., but they left on September 6, just a few days before Canada declared war. John's hard work the previous winter had resulted in a scholarship, but times were still difficult. In order to participate in choir and school activities, he declined the offer of a weekly pastorate and worked instead as assistant librarian at the college and preached occasionally at various churches in the area. The teachers, realizing his abilities, occasionally asked him to teach the class when one of them was absent. In late December, 1939, A.E. Janzen suggested that if he wished to continue his studies and then return to Tabor

to teach, the college would sponsor his studies. John was not ready to accept such an offer for he felt he should return to Canada and be involved in church work there. He felt a certain responsibility to the many Mennonite Brethren young people who were either immigrants or first-generation Canadians.

During the spring semester there were enquiries from three Bible Schools soliciting his services: Dalmeny, Hepburn and Coaldale. His Uncle Johann warned him that "*Der Name Toews ist wie ein rotes Tuch in Coaldale*" (the Toews name is like a red flag in Coaldale),¹² but this caution did not deter John. Perhaps he felt that, with both an uncle and a cousin teaching at Hepburn, he could test his wings more freely at one of the other institutions. His parents cautioned him not to make a hasty decision, but he soon decided on Coaldale.

Though the United States did not declare war until 1941, Americans were very concerned and students of college age, who could be drafted, were particularly concerned. Tabor students were no exception. The issue of conscientious objection to war and what mode it might take was a matter of discussion not only at informal sessions but also in class. An editorial in the *Tabor Bulletin* (10 November, 1939), the student paper, advocated the medical corps:

While soldiers are courageously fighting in the trenches for their country, it can only be fair that Mennonites risk their lives for God. This privilege can be accomplished only by giving first aid and ambulance services at the front line trenches.... It must be impressed on the minds of the world that this service takes as much and possibly more courage than fighting in the front line trenches.

Student opinion varied from openly advocating military service to staunchly defending the conscientious objector, alternative-service position. Most faculty members held to the latter position.

Frank Bushman, Herman Warkentin and John were the three Bachelor of Theology graduates of 1940. Frank went on to work in missions in the Belgian Congo and Herman went to India. Only John remained on the North American continent. Reflecting on his Tabor experience forty years later, on the occasion of receiving an

Alumni Merit Award, he remarked that he had gained a better understanding of the brotherhood and its leadership by attending Tabor College. At Tabor he had met leaders of the past and future. He had become personally acquainted with the founders of the school (H.W. Lohrenz, H.F. Toews and P.C. Hiebert) as well as with their immediate successors. (A.E. Janzen, A.R. Ebel, P.R. Lange, H.D. Wiebe, A. Foote, O. Harms and H. Richert) He had also learned to know the great diversity in culture and background of people coming from various areas of the far-flung constituency: from Texas to Saskatchewan, from California to Ontario. He had also become acquainted with the future leaders of the brotherhood: Dan Friesen, Waldo Wiebe, William Neufeld, Jesse Harder, Clarence Fast, Jake Kliewer, Chester Fast and Art Flaming. To John, knowing these people was a "great fringe benefit" of his years at Tabor.

Tabor College created in him a greater desire to serve Christ in the context of the Mennonite Brethren Church, as he remarked when receiving the Alumni Merit Award on May 21, 1977:

I had learned to appreciate our spiritual heritage not so much as a result of its articulation by the faculty, but by their life-style and involvement in service. I was also drawn into the pastoral ministry. The financial rewards were not great — perhaps a foretaste of things to come.

What I have especially appreciated at Tabor was the balanced emphasis on evangelism and social concern. This blending and balance has been one of my major concerns in my public ministry.¹³

Since both John and Nettie had attended Coaldale Bible School, they were familiar with the small southern Alberta town 100 miles east of the Rockies, which was noted for its prosperous, irrigated sugar beet farms. Mennonites had settled there in the mid-twenties and by 1940 the church was one of the largest Mennonite Brethren churches in Canada, with a membership of nearly 600 members. The Bible School was operated by a committee from the church, but it attracted students from all over

Alberta and even from other provinces. In 1940 John joined Benjamin Sawatzky, Jacob H. Quiring and Johann Unger as Bible School teacher. J.H. Quiring had studied five years at the Winkler Bible School and Sawatzky had studied several years at Herbert as well as at Winkler. Classes were taught in both German and English. Most of the students had only completed grade 8 and were able to attend because the school was held during the winter months — the time between fall sugar beet harvest and spring planting. The prospectus stated the following entrance requirements:

Young men and women over the age of 16 are admitted as students on the following conditions: Those who apply must be willing to submit to the rules, regulations and discipline of the school; to do hard work; to be criticized and corrected.¹⁴

Some, but certainly not all, came solely for serious biblical studies. The primary purpose of the Bible School was the training of lay individuals for the church, especially individuals qualified to teach Sunday school. Clarence Benson, Moody Bible Institute's Director of Christian Education, had published a series of booklets and these were used in the pedagogy classes.¹⁵ Scripture memorization and storytelling also had an important place in the curriculum together with doctrine, church history and fundamentals of faith.

John's lectures were noted for their organization, thoroughness and speed of delivery. Abe J. Klassen, his student for two years, recalled how several students timed B.W. Sawatzky, also noted for his quick delivery, and John, to see who could get in more words per minute.¹⁶ The outcome of this contest was, unfortunately, not recorded. Since John had taken some classes in conducting, he was also asked to direct the school choir. David Ewert, then a student at the school, writes that at times his face reflected discomfort when the choir failed to produce the desired harmony.¹⁷ Usually he had a friendly demeanor and in time came to be known as the "smiling"

Toews. There were those in the community who felt Bible teachers should be serious at all times, but John was not of this opinion.

Toews's personal interest in the students was evident from the beginning. If he knew when students were arriving, he would try to be at the train station to pick them up; when they were sick, he would visit them. Once when Abe J. Klassen was sick with tonsillitis, John appeared at the door with a Rogers Golden Honey pail filled with hot noodle soup.¹⁸ He had a special concern for the gifted students who had dropped out of school after completing grade 8 and encouraged many to continue their studies. Life of Christ, Missions and Church History were his favorite teaching subjects. He started collecting interesting anecdotes for church history to pique student interest.

Salaries for Bible School teachers were very low and paid only for the six months they were employed by the school. Families earning less than \$350 a year did not have to pay church dues, and for several years John and Nettie were exempt.¹⁹ Summers were especially difficult and there were summers when the family survived on the monthly family allowance check sent by the government. (Wilma was born in 1940, soon after their arrival in Coaldale, and John in 1944). Nettie always planted a garden and canned the vegetables needed for the winter months. Frequently, farmers from the local congregation brought them eggs or other produce. Meat was scarce and one day Elfrieda, then a preschooler, asked why the family never had chicken for dinner. Nettie suggested a prayer; that afternoon a farmer arrived on the doorstep with five chickens rejected at the market in nearby Lethbridge. There was a delicious chicken dinner that night and Nettie canned the four hens so that the family could have meat on future occasions.

In the fall of 1940 John occasionally worked for local irrigation farmers to supplement his income. He was an enthusiastic, hard worker and did not disdain manual labour. The children remember how he often lamented that they did not live on the farm where they could develop good work habits. The big social event of the week was Friday night at the Aron Baerg farm. John and Nettie could relax from the week's work with Aron, Gertrude and the children over a hearty meal and pleasant conversation. A special

bond was forged between the two families which lasted over many years.

Since the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church did not restrict itself to one or two ministers, John had frequent opportunities to preach sermons. On September 27, 1942, his home church of Namaka ordained him to the ministry. Both B.B. Janz and his Uncle Johann Toews spoke at the ordination, the latter emphasizing that the role of the wife should not be one of active participation in church activities but one of giving quiet support to her husband. John and Nettie spent most of the spring and summer of 1942 at Namaka helping his parents rebuild after a tragic fire on March 29, in which their home, together with all belongings, was burned. Although John had made a previous commitment for the summer to work in the conscientious objector camps, when the fire occurred he knew that the fifth commandment meant he must go home to help his parents with seeding and harvesting. Hired help was almost impossible to find during these war years. As early as 1935 the Mennonite Brethren had established a committee to outline the church's position on nonresistance. In 1937 the Northern District (Canada) of the Mennonite Brethren accepted the statement drafted by B.B. Janz and the committee:

...[W]e as citizens are not only obligated to pay taxes to our country, but also provide a service insofar as it does not run contrary to our conscience.... We should not hesitate to do all we can to serve the principle of life, whether or not it is connected with danger to life or with other difficulties. Cowardice, security, or any other excuses cannot play a role here or in any way influence conscience. We cannot, for example, oppose alternative service as disciples of Jesus.... In caring for the sick we serve the principle of life. If someone sends them into war, that is unto death, this does not rest upon our conscience, for this we do not have to answer.²⁰

B.B. Janz's strong advocacy of first aid, ambulance and hospital work reflected his Russian experience. There had been a positive response in Russia during World War I to the noncombatant medical corps under civilian authority. In Canada, before and

during World War II, the immigrants of the 1870s rejected Janz's stance, as did members of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches of Ontario, who favored forestry or agricultural service.

The Canadian government in May, 1941, announced that the Department of National War Services would establish Conscientious Objector (CO) Camps in national parks. The camps were transferred to the Department of Mines and Natural Resources in 1942. At first all COs had to go to these camps, but after 1943 some were allowed to work in agriculture and industry.

B.B. Janz was especially concerned about the spiritual life of the young men in the camps. He knew, from their many conversations, John's strong commitment to the peace position and, of almost equal importance, his fluency in both German and English. In Janz's opinion he was admirably suited to give spiritual leadership to the young men. The 1942 fire prevented John from making a major commitment to visit all the camps that year, but he did spend some time visiting the Alberta camps at Banff, Jasper, Glacier National Park and Seebe, a forestry experimental station. There were no ministers stationed at the camps but certain ministers with official approval made the rounds from camp to camp so that each camp was visited about once every two weeks. Usually the visiting minister was given a welcome reception. Ministers travelled by car, bus and also on foot.²¹

In 1943 John devoted most of the spring and summer to visiting the twenty camps in British Columbia (one complete circuit covered 800 miles). A former CO, John L. Fretz, wrote,

He was one of the dedicated pastors who visited regularly with the CO boys when we were in camp in British Columbia. I was from Ontario, from (Old) Mennonite background, but we were all treated as equals by brother Toews. He was one of the favorites of the pastors who came to visit us. He always had time to listen, share experiences, and give spiritual help, and he could make us feel that he was one of us.²²

The camp work brought John into contact with Bishop E.J. Swalm of the Brethren in Christ, who was Chairman of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches of Ontario, formed on July

22, 1940, and with J.B. Martin, representative of the (Old) Mennonite Conference. John appreciated their friendship and felt that Mennonite Brethren had much to learn from the groups they represented. John's many pleas for inter-Mennonite cooperation date back to his contacts during World War II.

One former camper remarked that John was the first Mennonite Brethren he had met who had had some college training²³ and who encouraged others to continue their studies. Although Mennonites and Brethren in Christ comprised 65-75 percent of the CO campers, there were also Theosophists, Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists as well as members of the United²⁴ and Anglican Churches. In all, there were twenty-eight different groups. Most of the Mennonite boys had come from the farm, but some conscientious objectors had professional skills and graduate degrees. When a church sent an inarticulate minister, he became the laughing stock of the group. John was friendly and intelligent and therefore the MB young men were proud when he appeared at the camp to speak.

Travelling from one camp to another for weeks on end was hard on the constitution. There were times when he was disheartened; yet he was there to cheer up others who often found their work monotonous and who were unable to utilize their skills. Many campers would have preferred a service more directly related to the suffering created by the war. Nevertheless, they found the experience spiritually enriching and they broadened their horizons through discussions with men from a variety of religious backgrounds. Henry R. Baerg offers this evaluation of his experience: "It was an enlarging experience to maintain personal love and to create close friendship with the various individuals of different background and training.... It was indeed an experience requiring self-discipline, self-understanding, and inter-personal and inter-group understanding."²⁵

For John the experience was enriching as well, bringing him into contact with individuals from many different denominations. He formed close ties with some of the campers and he and Frank C. Peters, a future colleague, first met at Camp Q3 in 1943.

Besides teaching at the Bible School and preaching in the local MB congregation, John was also concerned about outreach to the community. He realized that the Coaldale MB Church, comprised almost entirely of German-speaking immigrants from the Soviet Union, could not attract community people to its services. He and his teaching colleagues therefore sought to reach the English-speaking neighbors, among whom was a large contingent of displaced Japanese from the West Coast who had been shorn of rights and possessions and sent to southern Alberta to work in the sugar beet fields. John became good friends with Billy Tamagi, a Japanese Canadian minister from the United Church, and soon they were sponsoring services in a small schoolhouse and later at the United Church. Peter R. Toews, H.R. Baerg and other young people in the community became involved in this outreach program.

These community efforts occasionally incurred the displeasure of B.B. Janz and J.J. Siemens, the local church leaders. David Ewert, on the other hand, remembers how he and other teenagers appreciated these efforts to break out of the established ecclesiastical mold. Whenever possible, John tried to get the support of the MB church leaders for these endeavors.

John was also a strong promoter of Daily Vacation Bible School (DVBS) and served at least one summer as the Alberta coordinator of the West Coast Children's Mission. Bible School students were encouraged to spend several weeks each summer teaching DVBS, not an easy task when visual aids, workbooks and other materials, now readily available, were absent, and teachers had to rely on their own ingenuity.

Alberta Mennonite Brethren churches gradually became aware that John had a special gift for evangelism and so invited him for preaching missions. Most churches in the early 1940s were wary of non-MB missionaries, but John with his friendly demeanor and fluency in German, was one of their own and they welcomed him. Often he started his services with a story for the children in order to arouse their interest and because he wanted them to feel themselves a part of the service. The author has met many adults who told her they had accepted Christ as teenagers during one of

John's evangelistic campaigns. By 1944 John was accepting engagements in provinces other than Alberta as well.

John enjoyed his work at the Coaldale Bible School and the fellowship with co-workers such as B.W. Sawatzky, J.H. Quiring, Johann Unger, Jacob Franz, Sam Epp and his uncle Johann Toews. He was a teacher from 1940 to 1946 and a principal from 1944 to 1946. Academically, the work was not particularly demanding, but still John was anxious to continue his studies. While completing a Bachelor of Theology program at Tabor College, he had finished the junior college program they offered. Now he wanted to secure his B.A. He spent several six-week summer sessions at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon while Nettie and the children stayed in Namaka, on the farm. In 1946 he resigned his position at Coaldale in order to do the necessary year of study in residence.

Housing was extremely scarce just after the War because of the many veterans returning to the campus. For the privilege of being able to rent a two-room basement suite, John helped a Mennonite teacher build his house that summer. He still had to pay the normal rent but at least he was assured of shelter. So with three children, eight, five, and two years old, he and Nettie moved to Saskatoon. This was a very difficult winter for Nettie. It was her duty to keep three youngsters quiet so John could pursue his studies at the kitchen table, the only study space available. Because they were strapped financially, Nettie served meals to two medical students renting an adjacent room. The oldest children remember having to go to the outdoor toilet in thirty-below-zero Fahrenheit temperatures. Son John, just a toddler, ran away one day, declaring he was headed to the farm to see Grandma.

John was completely engrossed in his studies. He majored in history, a growing interest, and also took courses in the natural and social sciences. Due to the expanded student population, classes were staggered and labs were often held on Saturday afternoons. Nettie and the children welcomed spring and the prospect of returning to Coaldale. John graduated with great distinction, one of five students to do so in a class of 267 in May, 1947.

In January, 1945, A.H. Unruh had offered John a position at the newly-established Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, indicating he could teach subjects in his area of strength and then, through study on his own, fill in any deficiencies. Winnipeg would also provide opportunities to continue university studies. Unruh told him: *"Ich weiss es ja, dasz Du dort auf Coaldale eine bedeutende Kraft bist. Aber man kann Dich doch nicht auf die Laenge dort festhalten, da doch jeder strebsamer Lehrer vorwaerts will"* (I know that you are an important force at Coaldale but they won't be able to retain you in the long run, as every ambitious teacher wants to move ahead) Brother Unruh suggested he talk about the matter with B.B. Janz.

John replied that he felt it was in the interest of MBBC to have faculty members who had a formal education and a certain maturity. He indicated his intention to continue his studies and left the future of teaching at MBBC open. While John was studying at Saskatoon in 1946-47, J.B. Toews renewed the contact, offering him a position at MBBC for 1947-48. The official invitation was also coupled with a promise that he would receive help in pursuing studies toward an M.A. degree. This time John accepted with the following letter dated January 27, 1947:

With a deep realization of our limitations, imperfections and unworthiness, but also with unwavering faith in the all-sufficiency of God's grace to meet our every need, we want to accept the Lord's call to this new place of service. May His Name be glorified by our humble efforts and may our work contribute to the carrying out of God's purpose through our conference school.

The letter had no sooner been sent to MBBC when B.B. Janz wrote from Paraguay, indicating the dire need for someone to spend time in evangelism and Bible study with the newly-arrived refugees. He urged John to accept the assignment. John's reply indicated that his commitment was to MBBC, but if the administration should feel free to release him for the assignment, he would accept that as God's will.

C.A. DeFehr, largely responsible for financial arrangements at MBBC, was in Paraguay at the time and H.H. Janzen on leave for an assignment in Europe. The administration at the college felt that if John were also to be on leave, the work of the college would be seriously impaired.

Nettie and the children left Saskatoon for Coaldale after graduation and John spent five weeks in an evangelistic ministry in southern Saskatchewan. In August they sold the Model A Ford and travelled by train to Winnipeg, which was to be their home for the next twenty years.

John's concept of Christian vocation was profoundly influenced during the Depression and World War II, the period when he was a college student, a Bible teacher and a chaplain to conscientious objectors. His emphasis on the Christian's prophetic role in politics and society, on faith as the basis for serving the oppressed, and on the relationship of these to the MB's Anabaptist heritage, were already recognizable by the mid 1940s.

4

College Teaching

By the late 1930s Bible schools had been established in all the Canadian provinces where major Mennonite Brethren settlements existed. Several Conference leaders now felt that there was a need for an institution that would offer training beyond that given in the Bible schools, for these schools were experiencing an acute problem obtaining properly trained teachers. If the Bible schools were to survive and progress, it was agreed, the teachers would need an advanced theological education as well as a broad general education.

At the Canadian MB convention in Coaldale in 1939, Johann Toews, John's uncle, in his report on Christian education expressed a concern about young men being trained in colleges and seminaries where ideals and Scriptural interpretations might be incompatible with Mennonite Brethren conceptions and doctrines. He indicated that the return of such men to the churches could eventually undermine the foundation of faith on which the Mennonite Brethren Church and Bible schools were based.¹ The concern found a favorable response, but due to the onset of the War, no concrete decisions were made until 1943, when the Conference accepted a recommendation to establish a Bible College in central Canada, which would be financed and controlled by the Conference. Winnipeg, a gateway between East and West, was chosen as the site, because of its location and its many opportunities for Christian service. A board was duly elected and steps were taken to open a

school in Winnipeg in the fall of 1944, with A.H. Unruh, the well-known Bible expositor and educator, as President. In 1945 Unruh requested to be relieved of administrative duties and J.B. Toews² was appointed President.

Canadian Mennonite Brethren were facing an identity problem, as is usually the case in a changing context where there are new challenges. Most Canadian Mennonite Brethren were immigrants or children of immigrants. The Canadian religious scene was totally different from the Russian Mennonite commonwealth, which had crumbled during the post-World War I period. What was the role of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada? What were her theological premises? Her weaknesses? Her strengths?

A.H. Unruh, J.B. Toews, H.H. Janzen, who joined in 1946, and other MBBC faculty members saw it as their purpose to define the theology and mission of the Canadian MB Church. Starting in the late forties and for the two succeeding decades, most of the church workers and missionaries were graduates of MBBC. Conference and College leadership became almost synonymous. Thus, a kind of consensus theology and mission developed. It was a conservative, evangelical theology with a very decided emphasis on foreign missionary activity. J.B. Toews, in analyzing this phenomenon, makes the following statement: "The strong emphasis on preparation for missions from within a cultural sanctuary to people outside of this sanctuary historically must be viewed as an outlet of a spiritual dynamic, generated within the believing community through the study of scriptures on the one hand, and the struggle for cultural survival on the other."³ In the fifteen years immediately following World War II there was a tremendous expansion of mission activity among evangelical denominations, including the Mennonite Brethren. For a number of years MBBC even offered a course in the study of tropical diseases that might be encountered by prospective missionaries. There was no discussion at the Canadian Conference regarding the establishment of a liberal arts college at this time. The Mennonite Brethren, with their emphasis on the experiential, have always harboured some suspicion of higher education. *Ye jeleda, ye fekeda* (the more educated, the more

confused) was a commonly used phrase. Fear of a learned, formalized religion had led to an emphasis on the laity, not on the clergy, as was the case within mainline Protestant groups. Mennonite Brethren did not stress an intellectual foundation for personal religious convictions; rather, direct personal access to God was of supreme importance. Intuition and inspiration, rather than learning and doctrine, were stressed in their approach to Scripture.⁴

The main concern of the Conference was the training of workers in a setting which would preserve cultural as well as spiritual values — values which would be endangered if the young people were exposed to a non-Mennonite environment. Conference leaders were definitely concerned that the German language be preserved; at least half the courses at MBBC were to be taught in German.

John saw the opportunity to be part of this new educational venture as a challenge. The presuppositions on which the College operated were ones he could personally affirm. He supported the conservative theology as well as the strong evangelical flavor of the school. Because of his background and interest in history, he was asked to head the Department of Church History. It became his aim to provide a historical frame of reference for the students, in order to help them know who they were, why they were what they were, and how they had become what they were.

John introduced students to the various interpretations of history — to Carlyle's belief that great historical movements are the products of great men, and to Herbert Spencer's dictum that great men are the products of historical conditions and forces. Was Luther a cause or an effect? What about John Calvin, Menno Simons, John Wesley? His students will remember his insistence that "there is interaction between the group and the individual! Life is creative, hence social phenomena cannot be predicted with certainty."⁵

Two questions he continually asked his students to remain aware of in their studies were: "What happened when and where?" and "Why did it happen then and there?"⁶ He exposed students to pessimistic thinkers like Spengler, optimistic historians like Toynbee, and then to pessimistic optimists or biblical theists among

whom he included himself. He contended that the church historian should aim for objectivity in the investigation and acquisition of facts, but that complete disinterestedness and neutrality were neither desirable nor possible. His own personal love for the church and for Christ, as well as a keen interest in the subject, colored all his lectures. History for him was not the "norm for truth but the arena for testing truth."

Mennonite history was his forte and students were always amazed at his mastery of the details; he seemed to recite names, dates and places effortlessly. He was concerned about the lack of interest of many young people in their historical roots. In his opening lecture he always voiced this concern:

People without historical roots suffer from an identity crisis. This is also true of Christians. It is not sufficient to identify with the Christ of heaven or of personal experience. We must be able to identify with the Christ of history. He is the Lord of history. He has led his people in history.⁷

John was convinced that a knowledge of history, especially Mennonite history, added a new dimension to students' existence and on occasion quoted R.M. Lower, a great Canadian historian, who said: "Only the person who has a knowledge and appreciation of the past can live meaningfully in the present."⁸

Although John taught many subjects during his tenure at MBBC, Church History, Mennonite History and Acts were his regulars. The book of Acts was a favorite because it dealt with the New Testament concept of the church, a topic in which he had a keen interest.

In Acts we have the revelation of principles which are the results of Christ's coming. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believers we arrive at the completed structure of the New Testament economy, which is being filled in by the later Epistles. Acts is the key book of the New Testament; without it the Gospels would be without a proper consummation, the epistles without a

foundation. All doctrines are contained in Acts potentially (implied)⁹.

John referred to the Gospels as seeds and soil, Acts as the roots, and the Epistles as the fruit. However, to those who sought an exact pattern for the Church today, he cautioned that "Acts is a book of fundamental principles rather than a book of exact patterns" (*Ein Urbild, nicht Vorbild*).¹⁰ Acts classes usually ended in lively discussions, and on more than one occasion students urged him to establish a new church based solely on directives given in the New Testament. His background knowledge of the history of such endeavors forewarned him against giving in to such urging.

John thrived in the classroom. In the early years the students were often men and women almost his own age or even older, who had wide experience in life. He found joy and satisfaction in the give and take of such class sessions. In addition to his teaching, John was appointed Dean of Students in 1948 when H.H. Janzen relinquished this task in order to take over the Presidency. This was not a sought-after position because MBBC had very strict rules regarding deportment, established by the Board and faculty, which the Dean had to enforce. The rules were very similar to those at Moody Bible Institute and Prairie Bible Institute. There was a strict dress code: male students had to wear shirts and ties and be clean-shaven and ladies had to dress in school uniform. Dating was not permitted: "Contacts of any kind between students of both sexes are not permitted with the exception when school activities require it was one of the regulations."¹¹

Students were required to address each other as "Mr.," "Miss" or "Mrs.," or "Brother" and "Sister." Mixed groups were not permitted to go on missionary or extension work unless accompanied by a faculty member or someone appointed by the Dean. All students were expected to attend the weekly prayer meeting at the College and a regular Sunday service. Even the time for arising in the morning was prescribed:

In order to maintain a high standard of conduct, that all students may get the most benefit out of their school life,

it is required of all students to rise at 6:00 in the morning; and quietly get ready for the day's work....

At 7:30 p.m. students are to be in their own rooms for study. Congregating in the halls or engaging in loud conversation and laughter is strictly forbidden. At 10 p.m. (not later than 11 p.m.) students are to retire for the night's rest. All lights must be out by 11 p.m.¹²

Being the Dean of Students was a tedious task, although many of the routine duties were the responsibility of the monitors, one male and one female, who were responsible to the Dean. John took his task seriously and students still remember being called on the carpet for infractions of the dress or behavior code. In the second year as Dean he even devised two questionnaires which students had to hand in on a monthly basis. One of these recorded attendance at church and communion service and the other the students' activities when they were not in their quarters. In the *Olive Leaf*, the MBBC newsletter, John defended the rules and regulations by stating that they had "been formulated for the sole purpose of giving proper expression to our freedom in Christ, and to serve as a guide in practical social living."¹³

Former students say too much attention was given to the details of student life and behaviour, but Bible schools such as Prairie Bible Institute operated in a similar manner and the church constituency favored such regulations. B.B. Janz, after he visited Tabor College where he noted the relaxed relationship between the sexes and observed students wearing shorts for gymnastics, labelled the situation "*ein moralisches Sumpfloch*" (a moral quagmire). There were others on the Board who held similar views.¹⁴

By the time John and Nettie moved to Winnipeg in 1947 with Elfrieda, Wilma and son John, a certain family pattern was emerging. John saw his role as father to include responsibility for the material and spiritual well-being of the family. He brought home the monthly cheque and led in family devotions. Nettie generally took the children on walks, read them stories and tucked them into bed. On weekends John was often gone on preaching assignments and during the week he spent his nights poring over

books, preparing the next day's lectures. The first year the family lived on the main floor of 96 Martin Avenue, a house owned by MBBC, and five male students lived in the three upstairs bedrooms: Henry Krahn, Ernest Dyck, John Goertz, George Fast and Geerit Veendorp. With one bathroom for all, the morning was extremely hectic, especially since being clean-shaven was one of the rules.

David was born in May of 1948. John had taken Nettie to the hospital, but as there was no phone in the house, the news of his arrival was phoned to the H.F. Klassens, down the street, who then relayed the good news.

In the fall of 1948 the family moved into the "White House," an old house used as a ladies' dormitory, located on the site of the library building built in 1956. John studied in his office at the College and only came home for meals. For Nettie it wasn't easy to raise the children in a "fishbowl", but she did her best. The house was infested with mice, whose acrobatics between the walls bothered the children at night. One day Nettie killed nine — a record. Being close to the College and in a dorm did have one advantage — Nettie could sing in the Oratorio Choir with Director Ben Horch, because Elfrieda could take care of the younger siblings as long as adults were nearby in case of emergency.

The big event for the family was moving into their very own home, an older, two-storey house at 96 Noble Avenue in the Elmwood district, in 1949. They didn't possess a car, for the \$250 obtained from selling the old Model A had gone toward the purchase of a piano, to enable the children to take lessons.

Since moving to Winnipeg Nettie had experienced problems with a bronchial cold which seemed to persist. Eventually she was diagnosed as having bronchial asthma and began treatments for the condition. Son John also developed asthma; his was activated when a stray cat moved into his bedroom at the White House and he and David adopted it. When John started wheezing, the cat was given to the Humane Society. John also accompanied Nettie to the Children's Hospital across the Redwood Bridge to take the series of allergy shots. In time he outgrew the asthma, but Nettie's persisted and caused her to lead a less active life than she might

have preferred. During periods of stress and strain in the family, the asthma was particularly bad.

When John moved to Winnipeg, one of his goals, in addition to teaching at the College, was to continue his studies. Since United College was the only institution in Winnipeg offering advanced theological courses, he enrolled in its Bachelor of Divinity program soon after coming to MBBC. Here there were opportunities to engage in dialogue with persons espousing viewpoints other than those emanating from a conservative, evangelical background. Some of the friendships formed with United Church ministers continued for many years. In 1950, during the spring semester, he was released from teaching in order to complete his thesis. The thesis topic was "The Anabaptist Concept of the Church." He had read Harold S. Bender's essay "The Anabaptist Vision,"¹⁵ and was particularly impressed by the Anabaptist concept of the church and decided that he would like to do more research on the topic. He was concerned about fundamentalist influences on the Mennonite Brethren, which stressed a personal relationship with God, while putting little emphasis on church fellowship. According to John, the founding fathers of the Mennonite Brethren had taken the name in order to identify with the Anabaptist movement. They were not denying their Anabaptist roots but reaffirming them. John felt that in the MB Church there was a need for another reaffirmation almost a century later. By studying their concept of the church, he could perhaps help his own Church in its quest. He believed "a church without a past will soon be a church without a future."¹⁶

The Anabaptist vision, as John perceived it, defined the church as a community of believers, Bible readers, stewards, disciples and witnesses. If it was a community of believers, only those who had experienced the new birth and had voluntarily entered into a covenant with other believers belonged to the church. If it was a community of Bible readers, then the Bible was not only a book of doctrine but also one of ethics. Christ and the New Testament were the final authority; the Old Testament was interpreted in light of the New and accepted as the preparatory, provisional revelation of God. A community of stewards must be a brotherhood where mutual love and concern for every member found a clear expression.

In a community of disciples *Glaube* and *Nachfolge* (faith and discipleship) were inseparably linked. Baptism was seen as the initiation into the fellowship and nonresistance as an expression of discipleship. In 1524 Conrad Grebel wrote that true Christians do not use "worldly swords or war, since all killing has ceased with them — unless, indeed, we would still be of the old law."¹⁷ In a community of witnesses, everyone was involved. According to Franklin H. Littell, "the Anabaptists were among the first to make the great commission binding upon every church member."¹⁸ As he researched the matters, John became excited about the Anabaptist vision of the church and felt that a new commitment to these ideals was imperative. In the (Old) Mennonite Church, H.S. Bender and Guy F. Hersherberger were showing the way.

Before 1950 John had been known mainly as an evangelist; after 1950 he put more stress on discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* (1940), which pointed out the dangers of cheap grace not linked to discipleship, influenced him in this direction as did his own Anabaptist research. John still accepted evangelistic assignments but his emphasis changed. The ethic of love and nonresistance were now an integral part of the Gospel he preached.

In the spring of 1950 Winnipeg was inundated by the waters of the Red River. Nettie and the children found refuge on a Mennonite farm at Elm Creek while John stayed in the College dorm to help lay sandbags and guard the dikes. The summer that followed offered no respite. There were four weeks of meetings in Ontario, two weeks in southern Saskatchewan, two weeks in southern Alberta; this was followed by one week of conference activities in British Columbia and two weeks in Hillsboro in September. Such a schedule meant long absences from the family and left the burden of childrearing on Nettie's shoulders. When John preached in Ontario or British Columbia, the churches sometimes sent boxes of peaches, pears or apples, and consequently the children preferred these churches to those in Alberta and Saskatchewan. John, however, did not let size or location determine

his availability. A small struggling church was just as important to him as a large affluent one.

H.H. Janzen went to minister in Europe during the 1950-51 academic year, and J.H. Quiring became MBBC's Acting President. Since most of the faculty members were also noted for their preaching, it was only natural that they should receive many invitations to speak. This caused problems, however, in operating the school because the faculty was small and there were no substitutes. Guidelines were eventually established so that during the school year (except for weekends) faculty were excused only if they had speaking engagements which could directly benefit the College, such as a Bible Week at a Mennonite high school which might encourage students to attend the College.

Early in 1951, the Committee of General Welfare and Public Relations of the MB General Conference¹⁹ again invited John to conduct meetings in the South American Mennonite colonies for the three summer months as well as during the first semester of the 1951-52 school year. Although the College was short-staffed, the Board agreed to grant him a six-month leave of absence. B.B. Janz was particularly anxious that John go to South America. The task involved not only preaching but diplomacy and tact in working with the various Mennonite conferences represented in the colonies. John's interest in Mennonite history as well as his practical experience in the CO Camps would serve him in good stead. B.B. Janz wrote the leading brethren that John Toews could preach and serve as Bible expositor and that he was also a man of integrity, and objective in his manner of working. There had been some General Conference²⁰ — Mennonite Brethren strife, but Janz stated, "*Gegen dich, Bruder Toews, hat auch Saskatoon nichts*" (implying that J.J. Thiessen of the General Conference Mennonites also approved of John's assignment).²¹

During the spring of 1951, John, in addition to his teaching, participated in two major inter-Mennonite peace conferences — one in Alberta where H.S. Bender, Chairman of the MCC Peace Section, was the main speaker and one in St. Jacobs, Ontario, where John was the featured guest. He thoroughly enjoyed the Ontario

convention where more than 1000 attended and even the (Old) Mennonite bishops voiced their approval of his sermons. He had been cautioned not to offend in attire in any way such as by wearing a colored tie, a ring, etc.²², as the sponsors were expecting Old Order Amish to attend. When asked to give some background information on himself before the conference, he replied: "The only thing really worth knowing about J.A. Toews is the fact that he as a lost sinner has experienced the saving grace of God."²³ The whole experience was encouraging to him and he longed for a similar response from his own MB Conference.

The South American trip was to be John's first trip overseas since landing as an immigrant twenty-five years previously. Typically, he was relatively unconcerned about remuneration: "With regard to the financial angle of this work I might say that it has never been my primary concern in my ministry, but I have obligations to my family."²⁴ Eventually it was decided that \$165 per month would be sent to the family and he would receive \$50 per month. His task was to teach courses for ministers, hold evangelistic meetings and conduct sessions on nonresistance. A.H. Unruh was especially helpful in planning the curriculum for ministers' courses.

The six-month South American experience (June-December 1951) exerted a significant impact on John's thought and future ministry. He was faced with individuals who had not only deep spiritual needs but also physical, social and psychological needs. There were no simple answers to the many complex problems faced by the settlers. Dogmatism did not solve issues but only caused further bitterness and strife. The first Mennonite settlement in South America was established in Paraguay in 1928 by a conservative group of Sommerfelder, Chortitzer and Berghaler Mennonites from Western Canada. Settling in fourteen villages, they became known as the Menno Colony. The next group of settlers arrived between 1930 and 1932, after escaping from Russia to Germany in 1929. Unable to stay in Germany and finding it difficult to enter Canada or the United States, about 2000 out of the 6000 penniless refugees, aided by Mennonite Central Committee, established the Fernheim Colony in the Chaco. Two

hundred families, aided by the German Government, emigrated to Brazil at about the same time, founding settlements in the Kraul and Stolz Plateau area. Some of the Fernheim settlers, dissatisfied with the isolation of the Chaco and also upset about the colony cooperative, started the Friesland Colony in 1937, just 100 miles northeast of Asuncion, the capital. In both the Friesland and Fernheim Colonies there was considerable pro-German and pro-Nazi sympathy and in the late 1930s and early 1940s some settlers actually returned to Germany.²⁵

Between 1941 and 1943, when the German army invaded and occupied the southern Soviet Union, thousands of Mennonites fled to Germany. Many were repatriated forcibly but about 4,500, unable to enter the United States or Canada, migrated to Paraguay. The United Nations International Refugee Organization gave generous assistance to MCC in their resettlement and Fernheim, Menno, and Friesland Colonies also provided help. Some of the refugees settled in the already-formed colonies and the rest established the new colonies of Neuland and Volendam.

Many of the settlers had been unable to enter Canada for medical reasons. But they were not only medically handicapped; most of the immigrants had very few tools and equipment to pioneer settlements in Paraguay, a country with economic problems and political instability. A major problem was also the shortage of able-bodied men. The two new colonies each had 200 fewer men than women and one Neuland village was without a single male adult.²⁶

The Mennonite Central Committee and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, after the resettlement of 1947-48, immediately began working for "economic and religious rehabilitation."²⁷ After several decades without thorough religious teaching, not only economic but also religious revival was necessary. In 1948 both the Mennonite Brethren and the General Conference Mennonites in the colonies joined their respective North American Conferences and the latter began providing teachers and ministers for the colonies.

John, although he was a Mennonite Brethren, was to minister to all the people in the Mennonite colonies. Some Mennonite

Brethren and General Conference workers had become involved in inter-conference competition and strife, and it was felt that John, who had previously participated in inter-Mennonite efforts, might avoid this difficulty and work with tact and diplomacy.

Most of the time was allotted to the Mennonite colonies in Paraguay, but the itinerary also included Mennonite churches in Brazil and Uruguay. In Brazil he visited the Kraul and Stolz Plateau settlements as well as the pioneer group at Bage, Curitiba, and Sao Paulo, where Mr. and Mrs. David Quapp administered the MCC Home. In Uruguay he visited the new settlements composed of Danziger Mennonites and a few MBs of Polish background. B.B. Janz and P.C. Hiebert were responsible for preparing the itinerary which included evangelistic meetings, lectures on nonresistance and ministers' courses.

In Fernheim John was greeted by his friend and former colleague from Coaldale, Jacob F. Franz, who was working with the Lengua Indians in the Chaco. The three Mennonite branches of Fernheim, the Mennonite Brethren, General Conference Mennonite and *Allianz* Mennonite, all cooperated for the purpose of John's ministry. Parents were particularly concerned about the young people, many of whom made commitments to follow Christ, as did a number of men from a group that had demonstrated pro-Nazi sympathies during the war. The lectures on nonresistance were usually well received because John always used New Testament Scriptures rather than humanistic philosophy as a basis. There were men in his audience who had been forced into the *Wehrmacht* (German military) or into the Soviet army and then escaped; now there was a need to study what a Christian response to participation in the military should be. Sandwiched between meetings were counselling sessions and visits. Almost everyone in the colony had relatives somewhere in Canada, and John often knew them personally, as he had a knack for remembering faces and names.

The ministers' course attracted about sixty participants from the three Mennonite branches in Fernheim and Neuland. In the afternoon Hans Legiehn, Jacob Franz and C.C. Peters gave lectures,

but usually John presented the three morning lectures himself because the others were involved elsewhere.

From Fernheim, the oldest and most stable of the colonies, he moved to Neuland. Hot north winds and small schools lit with dim Aladdin lamps made evening evangelistic meetings a challenge. Sometimes he also slept in the schoolhouse in the villages, where even a family of five had only one bedroom. One of the most severe problems facing this group was the problem of separated families. So many men and women had been separated from their spouses during the war and were now uncertain whether the spouse had died or was in a Siberian labor camp. Even if the spouse was alive, would there ever be a possibility of being reunited? Should persons facing this dilemma be deprived of love and support from the opposite sex? John agonized with one woman who was living with a man she wished to marry and with whom she had had a child, yet she was not sure whether her first husband was dead or alive. For the child's sake it would be so much better if they were married; yet what would happen if the first husband reappeared? At that time the Church regulations were very harsh in such cases. Eventually the Church ruled that persons were free to remarry only if they had waited for seven years and had received no news about their spouses during that time.

Travelling to Friesland from Fernheim was an adventurous experience via railway, ship and wagon. In Friesland, as in Fernheim, the Nazi movement had attracted adherents from the church. B.B. Janz had been very much involved in trying to solve that issue and to a large degree was successful in reconciling the various groups. At the ministers' course John was the only lecturer. With the hot humid weather and three to four lectures a day, he was completely exhausted by the end of the day. He remarked that his suit was drenched after a two-hour lecture. In his diary John also makes reference to the lively insects (*lustiges Ungeziefer*) he encountered daily. As the weeks passed, the tropical summer approached and with it intense heat.

John had never been impressed with evangelists who paraded their conversion statistics, but he admitted to the committee under

whose auspices he had set out, that about 350 individuals had made personal commitments during his meetings in South America.²⁸ To Nettie he confided that never again would he accept such an assignment unless he had access to discretionary funds.²⁹ He had seen such hardship and suffering and had been able to offer so little in the way of assistance. He saw more clearly than before that evangelism and social action were both integral aspects of the gospel message.

He arrived back in Winnipeg on a snowy, cold December 23. David, only four years old, jumped and shrieked with joy when he saw his father. It was a happy reunion for the family. Nettie had not found it easy to be alone for six months with four children, aged from four to thirteen. Releasing John to do the Lord's work was a result of her own deep commitment. Did not the Scriptures say: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37).²⁹

The Coaldale Church had sent Nettie \$115 in June so she and the children could travel to Coaldale and visit with relatives and friends during John's absence, and this gesture of friendship was much appreciated. They travelled by bus and stayed in the summer house on the Aron Baerg farm until the end of August. When little David was asked what he had done during the summer, he replied that he'd been peeling chickens. The Aron Baergs had a contract with a club in Lethbridge to deliver a certain number of plucked chickens each week, and David had helped in this endeavor. During the first semester, Arnold Baerg, a nephew attending MBBC, stayed with the family instead of in the dorm. Nettie appreciated the presence of another adult, for in this way she could also stay in contact with what was happening at the College during John's absence.

While John was in Paraguay, H.H. Janzen had enquired whether John would be willing to teach Systematic Theology. It was considered a "heavy" course, and he hesitated since his background was rather in historical and practical theology. Eventually he consented and for many years he continued to teach the course. He realized the necessity for such a course but abstract, philosophical

reasoning was not his strength and he much preferred courses where he could use the historical approach. In a letter to J.B. Toews in February, 1952, he writes: "*Das ist ein Fach fuer J.B., nicht fuer J.A.*" (That is a subject for J.B., not J.A.)³⁰ No sooner had he arrived home and begun the preparation of lectures, when weekend invitations to speak began to pour in. Preparations to attend the Mennonite World Conference in Basel, Switzerland, in August, 1952, also required his time. John had been nominated as a delegate by the Canadian Conference, together with B.B. Janz, A.H. Unruh and C.F. Klassen. In a letter in March, B.B. Janz alluded to the fact that H.S. Bender and C.F. Klassen had suggested that John be one of the nominees since they would like him to participate in the program.³¹

The first Mennonite World Conference had been called in 1925 by Christian Neff, President of the Conference of South German Mennonites, in cooperation with brethren from Switzerland and the Netherlands. The meetings at Basel commemorated the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Swiss Anabaptist movement. Only one delegate from North America was present. The second meeting in Danzig in 1930 dealt with past and current relief efforts. C.F. Klassen, a leading MB layman, together with David Toews, H.S. Bender, B.H. Unruh and S.H.N. Gorter reflected on what had happened to Mennonites in Russia since 1917, on the exodus from Russia and on the emigration to Canada and South America. P.C. Hiebert, a Mennonite Brethren leader and Chairman of MCC, and C.F. Klassen were involved in the third Conference at Amsterdam in 1936, which was largely historical in nature, observing the 400th anniversary of Menno Simons's renunciation of the papacy. The fourth Conference, called in 1948 by MCC (Christian Neff had died in 1946), was the first to be held in North America, with meetings at both Goshen, Indiana and Newton, Kansas. P.C. Hiebert delivered the Conference sermon. Topics of concern included missions, relief, faith and life, and peace witness among others. Official Mennonite Brethren approval for participation in the World Conference was not given until 1951 at the sessions in Winkler, during the time that John was in South America. He was

thus one of the first official delegates appointed by the Mennonite Brethren to this body. The fifth Mennonite World Conference, held at St. Chrischona near Basel, had as its theme, "The Church of Christ and Her Commission." John's topic was "*Dienende Liebe*" (love expressed in service). For him this was the heart of the gospel, and he enjoyed preparing the address. At first it appeared he would be accompanying A.H. Unruh, but poor health caused Dr. Unruh to withdraw. Travelling from Winnipeg, however, were his friends, the C.A. DeFehrs, the B.B. Fasts and H.F. Klassen. Enroute to New York he made several stopovers. In Wheaton, Illinois, he visited with John Fadenrecht, formerly of Tabor College, about the possibilities of pursuing graduate studies at Wheaton College. In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, he gave a number of messages at a Peace Conference sponsored by the Brethren in Christ.

The *Mauretania*, with its 1125 passengers, left New York for Southampton on July 24. John's cabinmates were a 54-year-old Jewish gentleman who had spent time in a concentration camp, a 68-year-old agribusinessman from Oregon going to the World Conference, and a young student from Minnesota on a student tour of Europe. Outgoing by nature, John found that there were many opportunities to interact on such a sea voyage. He met Rev. Oscar Burkholder, Moderator of the General Conference of Mennonites, J.C. Wenger, Goshen College theology professor, as well as many other Mennonites on their way to Basel.³² When he wished to visit the DeFehrs and Fasts on the upper class deck, he was deterred by a steward but he nevertheless managed to circumvent the caste system several times during the trip. He was very unimpressed by the boxing matches put on for the passengers' entertainment and wrote that boxing must be an *Ueberbleibsel* (vestige) from barbarian times.

Although some of the passengers disembarked at Cobh, Ireland and Le Havre, France, John and most of the Mennonites went on to Southampton, from where they took the train to London. John Coffman, working for the Mennonites in London, was the appointed tourguide for the city. The Tower of London, St. Paul's, Westminster Abbey, Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, Bunning

Hill Cemetery, Trafalger Square, Buckingham Palace, House of Lords, House of Commons and the British Museum were among the stops. For John, immersed in European history for so many years, this was not just another tour. This was history come alive! It was a thrill for him to see the Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Alexandrinus and the original Magna Charta. He wrote that he could readily have spent a year at the British Museum.

John's particular pre-Conference tour next took him to Holland. The highlights here were the excursions to Pingjum, where Menno Simons had served as a Catholic priest before his renunciation of the papacy, and to Witmarsum, his birthplace, with T.O. Hylkema, Moderator of the Dutch Mennonites, as tourguide. They also visited Hereswegen, the center of the Dutch peace movement. John was surprised to discover that only 500 of the 50,000 Dutch Mennonites, or one percent, were actively involved in the peace movement but this included one half of the pastors. In 1952, twenty-nine Dutch Mennonite men were in jail because of their pacifist stance.³³

In Germany the tour group found war damage still evident in areas that had been heavily bombed. A reminder that there had been Mennonites in the U.S. forces involved in the destruction came when they crossed the Rhine at the place where the U.S. forces had crossed on a pontoon bridge. It was here that Lendon Flaming, a classmate of John's at Tabor College in 1938, had lost his life.³⁴ The group also visited Weierhof, where Christian Neff had ministered, Worms, where Luther took his stand, and Heidelberg, where B.H. Unruh, an educator and minister who had been instrumental in helping refugees and a brother to A.H. Unruh, greeted them.

The Conference itself was held on the grounds of the St. Chrischona Seminary, just outside Basel, Switzerland. "The Church of Christ and Her Commission," the main theme, was developed around subthemes such as the nature of the church. John noted in his diary that on the first day alone, seventeen messages and reports were presented. Although the official language was German, simultaneous translations were available at all major sessions in

French, English and German. His own message on *Dienende Liebe* was on the agenda for the third afternoon. A new feature of the Conference was the discussion groups after each main address. In John's particular group a number of vocal Dutch Mennonites who had been influenced by liberalism dominated the discussions. After Dr. Goltermann, leader of the Dutch liberal wing, used the Conference platform to urge support for the World Council of Churches and the cause of ecumenicity, John ventured a protest during the discussion, cautioning against unhealthy ecumenicity and citing the church in the pre-Reformation era and the twentieth century United Church in Canada as examples. He discovered that most of the delegates supported his position, rather than Goltermann's.³⁵ The Mennonite Scholars's Meeting following the main sessions was something of a disappointment for John. B.H. Unruh, in his development of the theme: "Do we need Mennonite theology?" seemed to advocate an acceptance of Barthian and Kierkegaardian approaches rather than a distinctly Anabaptist theology.³⁶

A highlight of the Conference was the historical celebration in Zurich on the final day of the Conference. Over 450 delegates were transported in fifteen buses to Zurich where Professor Fritz Blanke and Dr. Hans Warer conducted the historic tour through the old parts of the city. At the site of Felix Manz's martyrdom, the group sang "Faith of our Fathers," and at the home of Conrad Grebel a special memorial tablet was dedicated. The visit concluded with a special memorial service at the Grossmuenster. In his diary that night John wrote, "*Es wurde des Guten fast zu viel*"³⁷ (There was almost an overabundance of good things).

Following the Conference, John joined a tour group which, after several days of sightseeing in Switzerland, was destined for Rome. Finances did not permit him to join the group going to Israel. His diary is filled with detailed descriptions of all the famous sites in Milan, Rome, Florence, Pisa and Genoa. So many of these were of historical significance and gave him background detail for future lectures in Church History and Western Civilization.

On his return to Switzerland John spoke in both the Holee and Schaentzli Mennonite Churches before entraining for Frankfurt, where his friend C.F. Klassen directed MCC efforts in Europe. John, together with E.J. Swalm and J.B. Martin, both friends since World War II, were taken by Cornelius Wall to view various refugee centers and sites where MCC PAX volunteers were involved in the task of rebuilding. This visit helped them to get an insight into the work of MCC in Europe. After a brief visit to Tuebingen to see Gerhard Hildebrand, a cousin of Nettie's studying for a doctorate in theology, John continued his travels to Paris and Versailles before going on to Cherbourg where the *Queen Elizabeth* sailed for New York on September 10.³⁸

He arrived back in Winnipeg with 57 cents in his pocket, just in time to do some lecture preparation for the new school year beginning in October. It was a busy fall and in November he remarked: "Since I came back from Europe I have had only one weekend where I had no special assignments. This coming Sunday I will preach for the first time in my home church at the Northend of Winnipeg since June 1st."³⁹

The Revised Standard Version of the Bible made its debut in 1952, and by February of 1953 John was receiving enquiries concerning his evaluation of this new version. He cautioned laymen not to pronounce an early verdict but to wait until evangelical scholars had given their evaluation.

In April of 1953, the acquisition of a 1947 Chevrolet was cause for a family celebration. The \$250 acquired in 1947 from the sale of the Model A Ford in Coaldale had been used to purchase a piano in order that Elfrieda and Wilma could start lessons. For six years the family had been without a car, and so the children were especially excited. The car was bought in anticipation of a major trip to British Columbia to participate in a Toews family reunion in summer. MBBC students, who could watch the streets for the green "Chevy," now had several blocks warning of the Dean's arrival should they be involved in prohibited activities.

The Brethren in Christ were anxious to have John speak again at their annual peace conference. Bishop E.J. Swalm wrote: "The

appreciation which was felt for you and your message last year at Mount Joy will serve greatly to increase the numbers this year and be a definite attraction."⁴⁰ John was unable to go, however, because the Canadian Conference at Hepburn, July 4-9, created a scheduling conflict for him.

Prior to the Conference there was a flurry of letters regarding disagreement in the Peace Problems Committee of which John was a member. Preserving the peace of the Committee was at stake and the major bone of contention was B.B. Janz's strong support of noncombatant service. Both C.J. Rempel and John favored the (Old) Mennonite stance of not being involved with the military in any way whatsoever. P.C. Hiebert encouraged them in their position, writing: "I am becoming more and more convinced that through the defense of the noncombatant service we have weakened our standing as nonresistant Christians a great deal.... I feel like encouraging you to stand for your convictions in all humility and firmness."⁴¹ In a June 21 letter to C.J. Rempel, John confides:

I just can't see eye to eye with the dear brother (B.B. Janz) on this issue. The whole question of the *Sanitaetsdienst* is causing me grave concern. I do not feel we are doing the right thing as a Conference by sanctioning this type of alternative service.... I believe we are compromising our biblical principles, because the Medical Corps does not give an expression to our witness against war, although there may be a limited opportunity to witness for Christ in some ways. This matter is the chief stumbling block in our endeavor to cooperate with the other historic peace churches; I am thinking especially of the other Mennonite conferences.

C.J. Rempel and John had wanted to take their views to the Conference floor already in 1950 but, in deference to B.B. Janz, had not done so. This time, however, they did make their views public. John was also elected Conference Moderator and P.C. Hiebert, in his congratulatory letter, suggested that in his new position John might also be able to influence the Conference peace position.

The 1953 family trip to British Columbia via Yellowstone Park in the green Chevrolet was the first vacation trip the family had

ever taken. It was a time of family togetherness such as they rarely experienced. In Alberta they attended the Aron Baerg's 25th wedding anniversary celebrations and, in B.C., the Aron Toews family reunion. Mary, John's sister, who had been in the Belgian Congo since 1947, was home on furlough. The children also became acquainted with the eight Thielmann and five Toews cousins in Chilliwack and Abbotsford. Since John had deputation meetings on Vancouver Island, Nettie and the children accompanied him to the scenic area where he had spent months in the CO lumber camps during the war. Combining business with pleasure, sightseeing with evangelistic meetings, was part of the family life style; a trip to Cathedral Grove and an island sawmill was combined with an MBBC report at Black Creek.

John had visited Wheaton College in 1952 in order to investigate whether he could continue his studies there, but discovered that they offered a B.D. and an M.A. but no Masters in Theology program. His desire was to work for a Masters degree in a positive, evangelical institution since he had obtained his B.D. at United College, a school dominated by liberal and neoorthodox theology. Circumstances seemed to militate against John's leaving Winnipeg. He and Nettie had not been able to put much into savings on a Bible College teacher's salary (it increased from \$1800 in 1947 to \$2800 a year in 1953), and sabbatical leaves were still rare. Also, the College with its small faculty would have difficulty offering all the courses if one member were gone an entire year.⁴² Still intent on pursuing further studies, however, John started an M.A. program in History at the University of Manitoba in the fall of 1953. In a letter to his friend, C.J. Rempel, dated September 24 he wrote: "I shall be teaching 'half-time' and studying 'full-time' at the University. My 'spare-time' will be divided between Conference and family responsibilities. It's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer." He had enrolled for three seminars; at the same time he was Moderator of the Manitoba as well as of the Canadian MB Conference, Chairman of the Canadian Youth Committee, and member of the Peace Problems Committee and General Conference City Mission Committee. He obviously was not following his own maxim of refusing to do some good in order to do any good at all.

He found it particularly difficult to refuse to speak at peace conferences because he felt that he could make a unique contribution in this area.

Thus, despite his heavy load, he consented to speak at the eighteenth Session of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches at Niagara Christian College on October 20. Then from December 7 to 10 he was an official delegate of the Mennonite Brethren at the Conference on Church and Peace in Detroit. This event was attended by both pacifists and nonpacifists; John felt it was a good opportunity to observe and learn from others as well as give his own scripturally-based views. When he returned from the Conference, he made the following observations:

As I participated in the various discussion groups and came into contact with many of the "liberal pacifists" it became increasingly clear to me that we as Mennonites or Mennonite Brethren cannot identify ourselves with these groups, although there might be some value in remaining in contact with them. I believe there is a place here for a positive, biblical witness. But we must clearly distinguish between Biblical nonresistance and liberal pacifism. On the other hand, we cannot identify ourselves with the "fighting fundamentalists" either, although we have much in common with them. To speak of the blood of Christ and then go out and shed the blood of one's fellowman just does not seem consistent. Here is the dilemma for the true follower of Christ in our time. The solution to our problem will not be found in following liberal theology nor in following fundamentalist dogma, but in taking up our cross and following Christ.⁴³

It was an extremely busy fall and, to add to his worries, John started having problems with his eyes. The distorted vision was apparently the result of an optic nerve infection, but the specialist seemed unable to prescribe a cure. When relief did come after several months, John saw it as a direct answer to the many prayers that had been said for him. When John was under stress, Nettie's asthma also took a turn for the worse. All in all, it was a difficult year.

The death of C.F. Klassen in Germany on May 8, 1954, came as a shock to the whole constituency. John had last visited with him after the World Conference in August, 1952. C.F. Klassen's tireless efforts on behalf of Mennonite relief and refugee services had been an inspiration to the brotherhood as a whole and to John in particular. Klassen had fostered better understanding and cooperation among Mennonites of various denominations, and his gift of tact and diplomacy would be sorely missed. Throughout his service he had kept his direct, devout faith. John was one among many who paid tribute to him at the memorial service at the Winnipeg Northend MB Church.

Summer did not bring relaxation and relief. At the Canadian convention in Virgil the committee which had been asked to study the constitution of the Mennonite Brethren General Conference recommended that Sunday Schools, youthwork, higher education and home missions become Area (U.S. and Canadian) responsibilities. The committee also stipulated that representation on committees should be by population. General Conference activity since 1924 had centered in Hillsboro, where the denominational publishing house, Tabor College, and the Mission Board offices were located. The U.S. Conference included the Southern District, the Central District and the Pacific District, while Canada comprised the Northern District. Since representation on General Conference boards was by district, the usual ratio was three U.S. members to one Canadian on every Committee. John, in his *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, notes that: "This ratio was maintained (more the result of tradition than deliberate policy, to be sure) even after the Northern District membership equalled that of the other three Districts combined."⁴⁴ There were some Canadian brethren who would have stated it less kindly. They resented the attitude of some American MB leaders who, by their actions, seemed to imply that Canadian Mennonite Brethren could not chair committees or take on leadership roles, with a few exceptions, such as the Board of Reference and Counsel, Board of Trustees and Foreign Missions Board. The Canadians, mostly Russian immigrants, felt that they were being treated as stepcousins.

By 1951 Canada's membership exceeded that of the three U.S. Districts combined and Canadian leaders determined to study how they could bring about some changes in the operation of the General Conference. The recommendations brought to the floor at Virgil were supported by the Canadian Conference.⁴⁵ John, reelected as Moderator, realized that he would have an unenviable role at the General Conference in Hillsboro in October, when the matter would come up for consideration. He was able to resign from the City Missions Committee and from the Youth Committee to lighten his burden.

On returning from the conference he also had other matters on his mind. Over the years a number of brethren, including J.B. Toews, H.H. Janzen and F.C. Peters, had been asked to write a pamphlet on the biblical basis of the doctrine of nonresistance but nothing had ever been published. Finally John had yielded to the request of the Canadian MB Board of Reference and Counsel to write a brochure which was to be published within the year. The first draft, in fact, was to be ready by October of 1954. Personal and family matters also kept him busy. The house at 96 Noble Avenue had been sold and a new one purchased at 375 Donalds Avenue, which had a bathroom and a bedroom on the main floor. Nettie wasn't feeling well during this, her fifth, pregnancy and moving required more effort on John's part.

Classes had no sooner begun, when the Hillsboro General Conference loomed on the horizon. What happened at Hillsboro was inevitable, due to demographic and historical factors. Even so there were hard feelings when the Canadian delegation refused to vote on what it considered "area" issues, such as higher education. B.J. Braun was nonplussed by the Canadian reaction. Perhaps he had thought the Canadians would not follow through on the decisions made at Virgil in July. Because John was the Canadian Conference Moderator, many American MB leaders held him responsible for the Canadian response. Henceforth the Canadians would support Tabor College on a voluntary basis and not as a General Conference school. As a result of the 1954 actions, the Canadians viewed MBBC as their major educational institution and the U.S. established a Seminary and a Junior College in conjunction

with the Pacific Bible Institute in Fresno, and continued the B.A. program at Tabor College with a strong emphasis on the Bible Department. Population growth (the Pacific District had a larger membership than the Southern District by the mid-fifties) was responsible for the decision to build a seminary in Fresno rather than in Hillsboro, and to upgrade the Institute to a two-year college.

In September of 1953 John had been approached with the question of coming to Tabor College "to head the Bible Department" and "to build up the Bible Department into a seminary."⁴⁶ It was a preliminary enquiry and John wrote back that he felt the responsibilities he had in the Canadian Conference would not permit him to accept such an assignment at that time. What if he had headed Tabor's Bible Department? Would the recommendations regarding separate areas in higher education still have come to the Conference floor?

The fifth child, Irene Lois, was born on December 6, 1954. There were no problems with the delivery and Irene was a perfectly healthy, normal baby. Since Nettie was over forty, this last pregnancy had been particularly difficult and there was always the fear the baby might be born with special health problems. Nettie's health had deteriorated and her asthma became so severe that she had to have allergy shots once a week.

Despite all his other tasks, John was able to complete a first draft of *True Nonresistance Through Christ* by November, after which it was given to various members of the committee to read. P.C. Hiebert, Chairman of the General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel, upon hearing that John had accepted the task of writing a booklet on nonresistance, suggested that he write it for the whole MB brotherhood, not only for Canada.⁴⁷ B.B. Janz, on reading the manuscript, felt the style might be too heavy for the average young reader, but John's reaction was: "My estimate of the intellectual caliber of these young people is higher than that of the Brethren in Alberta."⁴⁸ J.B. Toews raised several doctrinal points, as did G.W. Peters. Criticisms were not unanticipated but, to use John's own words: "I have checked every point raised by them with

the members of the faculty. We feel the criticisms are not warranted, although the formulation of certain statements would have been modified, if such criticisms had been anticipated."⁴⁹ By the beginning of May, 5,500 copies of the booklet were ready for distribution (Canada-3000, U.S.-2000, reserve-500). Comments about the book by non-MB Mennonites were very positive. P.C. Hiebert wrote that H.S. Bender's reaction was very complimentary. Paul Erb, in a review in the *Gospel Herald*, indicated that, "It is good to have this branch of the church speak so boldly and so clearly on this historical Mennonite doctrine."⁵⁰ Melvin Gingerich, writing in the *Mennonite Weekly Review*, stated that it was a convincing presentation:

It deserves wide patronage among all branches of Mennonites and will no doubt be received appreciatively by many readers beyond our circles. In fact I am negotiating to have it translated into Japanese and plan to promote it widely in Japanese Protestant fellowships.... It is a very complete and wholly satisfying study of the foundations of true nonresistance in the life, teachings and death of Christ.... The central aim of this booklet is to show that those who submit unconditionally to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in faith and life cannot participate in war and violence according to the teaching of the New Testament.... Perhaps there is no better book than this to present to the fundamentalists who defends war. Such persons cannot help being completely convinced that the author is not only thoroughly evangelical in his faith but that he is completely familiar with the teachings of the Bible.⁵¹

John needed these words of encouragement. Although C.J. Rempel and P.C. Hiebert, as well as others, had continually given him their support, there were other brethren who were not enthusiastic about John's strong advocacy of the peace doctrine. Because pacifists are often liberal in theology, many U.S. Mennonite Brethren pastors were suspicious of all literature in this field, including John's booklet.



J.A. Toews, last photo taken (1978)



**John A. Toews with David
Isaak in Russia (1924)**



**Agnes, Mary, John and
Nick (1917)**



**The Toews' first car — John at the wheel and brother Nick
standing at the back**



The Toews Family (1930)



The "Bucket Brigade", Coaldale Bible School (1932-33)



John A. Toews working on his father's farm in Namaka.



**Wedding picture of John A.
and Nettie Toews, Nov. 9, 1935.**



**J.A. Toews family with
J.F. Harms, Hillsboro (1939)**



**Coaldale Bible School friends
— J. Neumann, J. Baerg,
J.A. Toews (1932-33)**



**Coaldale Bible School Faculty:
B.W. Sawatsky, J. Neumann,
J.H. Quiring and J.A. Toews
(1941)**



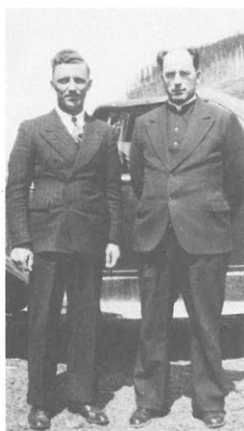
MBBC faculty, 1947-48 (l-r): J.H. Quiring, B. Horch, E. Horch, H.H. Janzen, A.H. Unruh, J.B. Toews (president), H. Wall, J.A. Toews



Bible teacher conference, Saskatoon (1941). First row (l-r): Gerhard Sukkau, H. Regehr, C.C. Peters, A.H. Unruh, Joh. Goertz, G.W. Peters. Second row (l-r): Gerhard Pries, Heinrich Dueck, J.H. Quiring, G.D. Huebert, J.A. Toews, Gerhard Thielmann, B.W. Sawatsky.



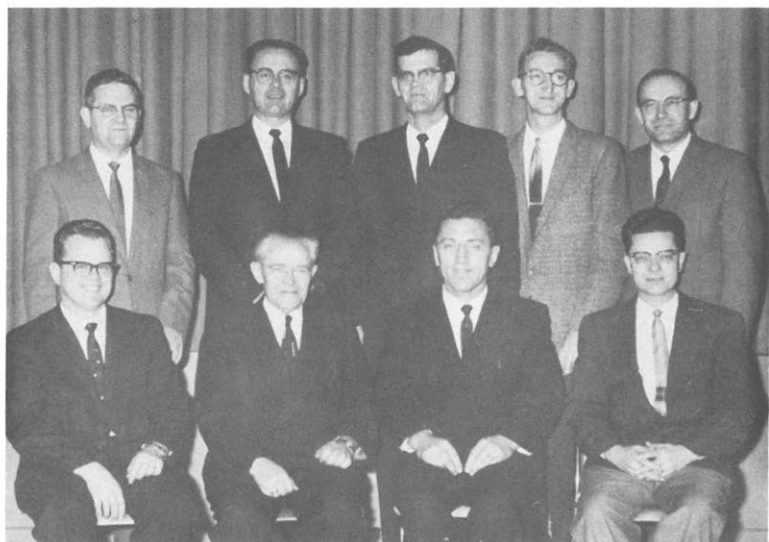
MBBC minister's course, 1950. Front row includes faculty second to the left: J.A. Toews, J.H. Quiring, G.D. Huebert, H.H. Janzen, A.H. Unruh.



B.C. Forestry Service Camp — Toews and Gilmon



President J.A. Toews with MBBC Board members, J.H. Quiring, B.B. Fast, C.A. DeFehr and H. Regehr.



MBBC Faculty (ca.1960). Front row (l-r): V. Martens, C. Wall, J.A. Toews, H. Giesbrecht. Back row (l-r): H.R. Baerg, F.C. Peters, J.J. Toews, P. Klassen, D. Ewert.



Graduation with great distinction from University of Saskatchewan (1947)



Graduation from University of Minnesota. (1964)



1960 family picture.



Peace Conference in Detroit.



Mennonite World Conference Executive (l-r): C.J. Dyck, S. Djojodihardjo, E. Waltner, E. Ens, J.A. Oosterbaan, J.A. Toews, M. Belete, J.C. Wenger.



Presidium of the Mennonite World Conference in session Aug. 4-8, 1969, Kinshasa, Congo. Seated (l-r): S. Djojodihardjo, J.C. Wenger, E. Ens, E. Waltner, J.A. Oosterbaan, Million Belete, C.J. Dyck. Standing (l-r): Ernst Hege, ? , Ernesto Suatez, Henry Poetker, M. Hein, Paul N. Kraybill, Reuben Short, Harold Schmidt, J.A. Toews, Alvin Burkholder, J. Harischchandra, Don Jacobs.



Mennonite World Conference delegation and Mennonite leaders at Alma Ata, USSR. Individuals include Bernhard Sawatsky, Novisibirsk; Franz Wiebe, Tokmak; Cornelius Dyck, Alma Ata; Million Belete; Cornelius Wiebe, Alma Ata; John A. Toews; Jakob Thiessen, Karaganda; and Traugott Quiring. (1977)



With Paul Kraybill, executive secretary of M.W.C. (ca.1977)



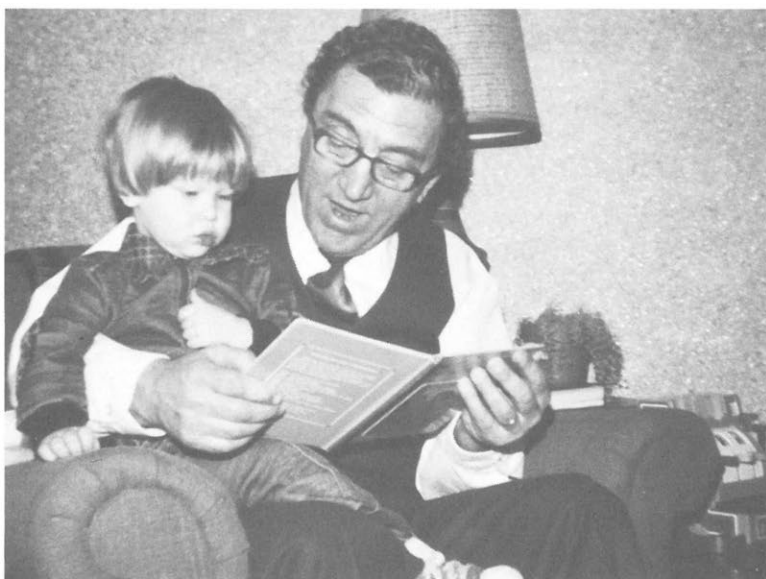
1979 MBBC yearbook dedicated to J.A. Toews.



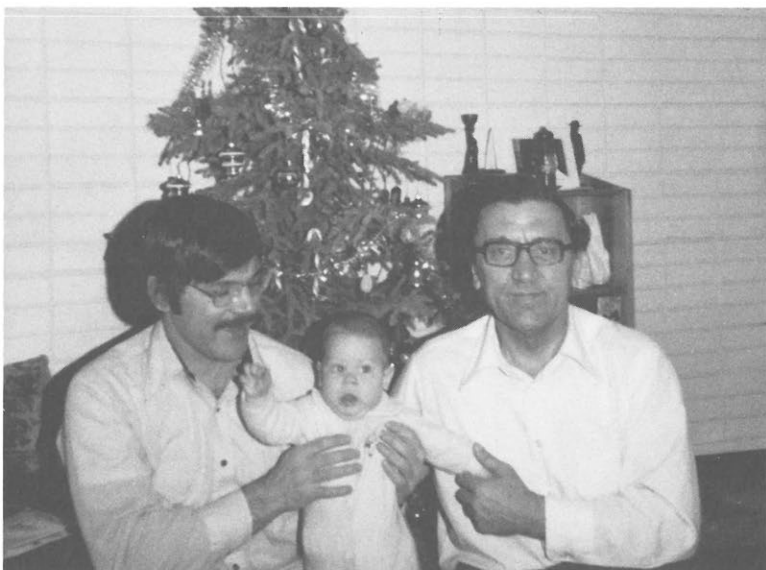
Back at MBBC in 1978.



J.A. Toews helping an MBBC student (ca.1978).



Reading stories to grandson Matthew Toews.



**Christmas 1976 in Winnipeg – 3 generations :
John A. grandpa, John E. father, Jonathan W.A. grandson.**

5

Leadership and Responsibility

John assumed the presidency of MBBC in September of 1956, a few weeks after his forty-fourth birthday. He phoned Nettie from the Conference before he accepted the position, but he assumed that she would be as supportive as she had been in the past. Although he had not campaigned for the position, he was not averse to its potential for legitimate power and prestige since he knew that often people with authority can accomplish more than those without it. Since he was a supporter of church institutions, being president of one of these would give him the opportunity to give guidance in a certain direction. It would allow him to influence his own Church and Conference in the direction of true Anabaptism. He was never interested in power for the sake of power but worked extremely hard on many major committees of the Conference in order to effect change.

Obviously the new position would mean even less time for the family. Elfrieda had just graduated from high school and was able to continue her studies at United College, thanks to a scholarship she had received. Wilma was sixteen, John twelve, David eight and Irene two. Because of Nettie's health, the two oldest girls had to do many of the household chores. When they took part-time jobs, son John helped with babysitting Irene.

The two older girls had not been particularly happy that their father was Dean of Students, especially when he tried to enforce College rules at home. Elfrieda had to beg for her first pair of jeans to take to Camp Arnes. Obtaining permission to go bowling with friends caused a minor controversy at the dinner table before

permission was reluctantly granted. Makeup and jewellery, particularly earrings, were frowned upon. When Elfrieda donned small pearl earrings one Sunday morning, John asked her to remove them before they continued their ride to church. John's argument against makeup and ornate jewellery was simply that people who lacked inner beauty and strength of character tried to compensate with outer adornment. "The less you have on the inside, the more you hang on the outside." Arguing about earrings was to no avail for his inevitable reply was, "Why not wear a nosering too?" The children were often reminded not to offend the "weaker brother" but found it strange that the brethren who took offense were often church leaders, such as B.B. Janz, who could not be considered "weak." John was obviously a product of his time and there were other Mennonite fathers who held similar views, but this didn't make matters any easier for the children. Usually the children relayed their requests through mother, who would then approach father at an opportune moment. Students at MBBC might go to him for counselling, but the children usually sought out their mother. There was respect and appreciation for father and the work he was doing, but not the spirit of camaraderie which was to come later. While he was in his forties and early fifties, John seemed to derive his greatest satisfaction from the College rather than from his family.

Andrew Shelly, while speaking at an MBBC Conference, spent an evening with the family and later wrote:

In being with the family even a short period one gets a general impression of the tone of the family. It was a thrilling experience for me to be able to fellowship about the table and afterwards with your family. From little David to university student Elfrieda, certainly the spirit of the family showed forth a very wholesome faith and attitude. For me to be with you was a real lift.¹

Institutions, like human beings, pass through certain stages in their existence. With the retirement of A.H. Unruh in 1954 because of poor health, and the resignation of H.H. Janzen in 1956 in order to pursue his calling as Bible expositor in Europe, MBBC ended a

certain phase of its existence. The presence of A.H. Unruh and H.H. Janzen had been reassuring to the older generation. Both were well-known Bible teachers within the Conference and both taught their courses at MBBC in German, the language with which they felt most comfortable.

John was appointed President upon the unanimous recommendation of the Board in July of 1956. Although he had dreams of further expansion, his immediate aim was to reassure the constituency that the purpose of the College would remain, as heretofore, to train young men and women for church vocations. In his report to the Conference in 1956, he remarked; "The character of a school finds its expression in its name. It is a Mennonite Brethren Bible College. Through God's grace the school shall retain this character."²

H.H. Janzen, in his farewell speech, intimated that he foresaw radical changes in the next ten years as the College developed its secular offerings. He agreed there would be changes in language and curriculum because the times demanded a new direction. He admitted that he felt inadequate to administer such a program since he had not attended any schools in North America. Frank C. Peters, working on a Ph.D. in theology and psychology, had promised to join the faculty in 1957 with the understanding that there would be an expansion in the liberal arts offerings.

In 1955 the U.S. Area Conference had established a seminary at Fresno under the direction of Dr. G.W. Peters, a Dallas Theological Seminary graduate, causing some to call Fresno a "mini-Dallas." Strong pressure was brought to bear on the Canadians to support this venture, but John, among others, was opposed to it. He did not perceive a seminary in Fresno as being capable of meeting the needs of the Canadian constituency, which still had most of its services in German and where a lay ministry rather than a salaried ministry was common. The fact that he and G.W. Peters had strong theological differences may also have influenced his stance. The seminary in Fresno did not claim to be Anabaptist until ten years later, with the appointment of J.B. Toews as President. The faculty then was more interested in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)³ than in inter-

Mennonite cooperation. In a letter to H.R. Wiens in February, 1956, John confides: "We have altogether too many brethren who are not any more 'Mennonite Brethren.'"

With the coming of F.C. Peters in the fall of 1957, many felt that MBBC had as strong a faculty as the Seminary, and so John, David Ewert, Frank Peters and others favored a Canadian MB seminary situated in Winnipeg.

H.S. Bender had instigated discussions with the (Old) Mennonites, regarding MB association with their seminary. In February of 1955, Bender had written to the General Conference Board of Reference and Counsel about the possibility of locating a Mennonite Brethren seminary in the proximity of Goshen. He envisioned an independent seminary which would, however, cooperate with the other seminaries so that there could be an interchange of students and one school need not offer courses better offered by another.⁴ The Mennonite Brethren rebuffed this offer which the General Conference Mennonites, on the other hand, accepted. John realized the location was not near any Mennonite Brethren churches and posed many problems but he was much more in agreement with the theological direction of the (Old) Mennonite seminary than with that of the MB seminary in Fresno.

John had received a grant for August, 1956, to travel to Ottawa to do research on alternative service during World War II, the topic he had chosen for his MA thesis at United College. In September he assumed his new post. Of course, since MBBC was a small college, he still taught three courses: Mennonite History, Systematic Theology and Acts. He wanted to continue to teach Mennonite History because he felt he had a mission to instill in MB young people a love for their heritage. The book of Acts had always been a favorite with John.

B.B. Janz didn't even give John time to settle in before writing a letter of reprimand. Janz wrote concerning the offensive relationship between the sexes at MBBC — of love affairs occurring day and night and of women infatuated with young men:

*Der zu freie anstoessige Verkehr der Geschlechter mit
Liebesaffairen Tag und Nacht, wo die Schwestern vielfach*

gewisse Juenglinge als ihre Wahl umschwaermen, soll je laenger, je schlimmer geworden sein, dass Eltern sich fuerchten ihre Soehne dorthin zu lassen.

Students were astounded at Janz's perception of College student decorum. In a letter John indicated that while he did not question Janz's integrity he felt that the facts did not support the charges. There was no evidence that "love affairs" (meaning flirting and dating) were occurring regularly. John added, in his letter, that because a mother did not approve of her son's choice of girlfriend, generalizations should not be drawn about all girls.

To reassure Janz that he was still supportive of a conservative ethical stance, he related his experiences at the conference for "deans of men" at Moody Bible Institute in June, 1956. Of eighteen schools represented, MBBC was the only school where dating was not permitted. John had unashamedly defended the position in the face of strong opposition. He contended that, with God's help, MBBC would continue to take such a position.⁵

The new library and music building was dedicated in October of 1956. H.R. Baerg and Victor Toews were added as new faculty members. In general, a spirit of optimism prevailed and the talk was of expansion and growth. John's dream was to offer a BD program at MBBC. He may not have realized the tremendous investment in library and faculty resources that such a venture, if it was to be successful, would require. Other denominations had unsuccessfully tried to offer a BD course in conjunction with a BTh or BRE program. Usually students who graduated from the latter programs, however, wished to attend another institution if they desired a graduate degree. The faculty for the graduate and undergraduate programs would be the same because MBBC was still a small school. Some courses would inevitably be offered for both graduate and undergraduate credit. The Mennonite Brethren in Canada were a relatively small denomination; unless they recruited heavily in other churches, the number of students who could avail themselves of a BD program would never be more than a handful. John and the MBBC faculty, however, seemed to feel that if Fresno

could do it, they could do so as well. In any case, the dream was never fully realized.

In December of 1956 Mennonite Brethren church leaders had their first study conference, then called an Introductory Study Conference, in Winnipeg. It was to be the first in a series designated to cover all areas of doctrine that required some unifying statement of doctrinal position. At this conference, topics such as the scriptural concept of the church, sanctification, baptism and infilling of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, the preservation of the believer and the separated life, were discussed.

One issue on which John differed from several other MB leaders was baptism. This came to light when H.S. Bender wrote an article on "Immersion" for the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* and sent it to several MB leaders for a critique. Some wanted major changes in the article, whereas John approved it, except for a few minor details. He wrote Bender:

I agree with you that occasionally excessive claims have been made for immersion on historical grounds. To me personally it has been a matter of real concern that the mode of baptism has been such a serious barrier to inter-Mennonite relations. The world and the church of today certainly need our united witness.⁶

During his seven years as President he developed a distinctive administrative style — the brotherhood or consensus style. He believed the chief administrator was not a dictator but a facilitator who must try to bring out the best in every person for whom he was responsible. Thus, weekly faculty meetings were important to him. Some teachers may have considered these two hours each week unnecessary, but these informal sessions were "forums where ideas and concerns were expressed very freely and prayer was made."⁷ There was a spirit of openness and John would relate the major concerns facing the school and seek out the opinions of all, as he wanted the assurance that the faculty would back him in the decisions he made. The decisions to develop a BD program, to seek accreditation and to expand course offerings, were always first discussed at such meetings. David Ewert relates that on several

occasions John hesitated when the faculty urged him to appoint instructors, but then did so because the general consensus favoured such appointments. Since faculty members had an input into major decisions, Ewert comments, there was generally a feeling of strong *esprit de corps* during his tenure as President, a very important ingredient especially in a small school.⁸ Student government leaders may not have found him as accommodating as did the faculty, and there were occasional confrontations. Later he would apologize if he felt he should have handled the matter differently.⁹

One habit which irritated a number of faculty members was his habit of dropping in on colleagues before their 8:30 classes in order to converse and dialogue. Since he spent every evening in preparation for the next day's classes, he seemed to be unaware that some faculty members might actually be making last minute notes or be reading material essential for their next lecture. The gesture of friendship was well-intentioned for he was genuinely interested in each colleague's welfare.

He had a good working relationship with Anne Schmidt, College accountant, and Charlotte Janzen, secretary. Charlotte urged him to use the dictation machine more often to save time, but he commented that his thoughts flowed when he used a pen and didn't flow if he dictated.¹⁰ Many of the details of the job were ones a business manager should have handled, but such a position did not then exist. The installation of a heating system, the acquisition of a large doughmixer for the kitchen and the problem of payments on a station wagon which was to be used for deputation and outreach were matters he would gladly have delegated. He was more interested in overall policy than in the mundane day-to-day operations, but faithfully carried out the latter as well. The classes in Mennonite History, Systematic Theology and Acts, in which he could engage in dialogue with students, highlighted his week.

The almost daily afternoon coffee breaks in Ebenezer Hall with F.C. Peters, David Ewert and occasionally others were special times of an open interchange of ideas. There was a mutual trust and confidence as they explored new areas of theology and ethics

together. One student remarked to F.C. Peters: "We had a feeling you fellows liked each other."¹¹ Ewert, Peters and John, all strong individuals with their own areas of expertise, became a sort of troika, a core staff. Unfortunately, some of the other staff members may have felt overwhelmed because these three predominated.¹² In larger schools this collegial grouping might not have created a significant problem, and MBBC was not only the first small theological school with several dominant individuals on faculty.

When John became too serious in his discussion, F.C. Peters would deflect him with a joke and so break the tension. Although John laughed heartily at the jokes of others and had a good sense of humor, he himself did not have the gift of breaking tension with lighthearted banter. Sometimes he seemed so serious, so intent on winning the argument, that he didn't realize that winning might mean losing.

The late 1950s were a period of growth and development for the College. The faculty were excited about expansion, but the prospect of expanded course offerings and association with a university for accreditation also meant that the faculty needed to pursue higher academic degrees. F.C. Peters was the only member with a PhD in the late 1950s. David Ewert and John both decided it would be in the interests of MBBC and the whole brotherhood if they acquired advanced degrees. Since the University of Manitoba did not offer a PhD in History, John started making enquiries at the University of Minnesota. During the winter of 1958-59 he and Ewert drove to the University of Manitoba together every Saturday — John to study Russian and Ewert to study Hebrew.

The summer of 1958 was one that would long be remembered. The Baerg family in Coaldale had always been very close to John and Nettie and the children ever since they had lived there. Now that the boys were getting older, John and Nettie, worried about instilling the work ethic in their city children, made arrangements for son John to help on the Baerg farm for the summer. On a mixed farm there was always a variety of chores, and extra help was welcome. Cousin Bill Baerg was six years older than John, but the two boys soon developed a close rapport.

One day in mid-July Bill couldn't get his motorcycle started and asked John to pull it with the tractor. John had no sooner started the tractor, when it overturned. According to the Coaldale doctor John was lucky to be alive. His pelvis was broken in five places. Immediately after hearing the news, John and Nettie left for Coaldale, driving day and night to get there as quickly as possible. John had been so busy with church and conference activities that these days of driving and being with son John at the hospital were a time of reflection on the meaning of family. Son John received excellent care at the Coaldale hospital, and the church community went out of its way to show friendship and care. By September he could travel to Winnipeg on a stretcher in a train compartment. By November he was back at the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate and by January of 1959 he was playing hockey, contrary to the doctor's predictions.

On August 9, 1958, John's parents celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in Clearbrook, B.C. John and Nettie, Wilma, David and Irene travelled by car via Coaldale; Elfrieda, who had a summer job, went by bus, also stopping in Coaldale to see her brother John. The golden wedding was a time of reflection and celebration. Aron and Agnes were grateful to be able to celebrate the occasion with their children and grandchildren. Aron's major accomplishment in his later years had been the chronicling of the sufferings of some of the Russian Mennonites in two volumes, *Mennonitische Maertyrer*, a saga of heartache and triumphant faith capable of jolting the complacency of future generations. Aron valued scholarship and he and Agnes were proud of John and his position at MBBC. For a number of years Aron was on the MBBC Board.

When John was asked in 1958 to analyze the trends in the MB Church, he referred to cultural, social, vocational, educational and religious trends. He saw urbanization and bilingualism as the major cultural trends which affected the entire life and outlook of Mennonite Brethren people. The immigration after World War II had delayed the transition to English, but even so most churches had services in both languages. As social trends, he listed smaller

family units (an indication of some form of birth control), the decline in quality of family life, and an increasing interest in sports and other forms of amusements. He pointed out the many vocational options available to Mennonite young people. Very few entered farming, which required a lot of capital. John was particularly concerned that with these many options, young people should receive some guidance from the Brotherhood. For "a Christian must witness not only in his confession but also in his profession." John also pointed out a trend toward a greater commitment to education. More students were now completing high school and attending Bible schools and the Bible College. In order to make Bible study more accessible in urban areas, he suggested the introduction of evening Bible schools in large city churches.

As far as religious trends were concerned, he saw greater emphasis being placed on form and ceremonies — on the aesthetic — than was previously the case. He also worried about what he felt was a gradual divorce of ethics from doctrine and faith and an increasing loss of nonconformity in life-style. Yet on the positive side of the ledger, he noted an increased interest in and support for missionary activity and outreach both at home and abroad. All of these trends presented dangers as well as opportunities. John reminded others that early Anabaptism in Switzerland began in the cities.

We cannot rely on the protecting influences of isolation. To preserve and transmit our spiritual heritage and message, an intensive teaching ministry will be required to provide inner spiritual reinforcements. The third generation has the tendency to lose the vision and depth of experience of the founders of the church. It is the crisis generation. Only a new manifestation of God's sanctifying grace can change the negative trends and tendencies.¹³

Starting in the mid-fifties, John regularly participated in two annual Bible conferences—one during the Christmas break in the Winnipeg Elmwood MB Church, and one at Easter in the St. Catherines, Ontario MB Church. John enjoyed these occasions of

working together with David Ewert and Frank C. Peters, as he had enjoyed working with H.H. Janzen and A.H. Unruh in earlier years. The conferences usually consisted of six or seven expository messages on one of the epistles. Henry F. Klassen, editor of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, a popular German-language weekly paper, nearly always published them, and in 1964 published the conference expositions on I Corinthians in booklet form. John was noted for well-prepared sermons and usually spoke extemporaneously from a fairly detailed outline. This practice produced audience rapport but resulted in a lot of extra work in order for the sermons to be published later.

Whenever possible John had accepted weekend and summer speaking invitations. It was a real change, therefore, to spend three summers (1959-61) engrossed in his PhD studies at the University of Minnesota. But even in the midst of his studies he managed to take time to attend the Canadian Convention, where he was involved in numerous committees. In 1959 the question of church publications was a major issue: should there be one paper for the whole Conference, as the U.S. Area Conference desired, with a Canadian associate editor to look after Canadian interests, or should the Canadian Conference launch its own paper? To complicate matters, the *Canadian Mennonite*, an inter-Mennonite weekly edited by Frank H. Epp and published by D.W. Friesen and Sons, made an overture suggesting that one Canadian inter-Mennonite paper might be the answer and indicated that the *Canadian Mennonite* was interested in such a cooperative venture.

John was loathe to become involved in the publishing issue as there had been much negative response to his stance on higher education at the General Conference level of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Although he could see the necessity for a Canadian MB paper or even a Canadian inter-Mennonite paper, he did not wish to become the major spokesman for the cause.

In the fall of 1959 MBBC introduced the two-semester system in order to allow the faculty more flexibility in teaching. For John, as MB historian, 1960 was a very special year. The Centennial of the Mennonite Brethren Church offered many opportunities to

pause and reflect on the meaning of the Church's founding in Elizabethtal, Southern Russia, in 1860.

In his personal life 1960 was also special because he and Nettie marked their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary with a special program of thanksgiving in the Elmwood MB Church. Since the Centennial Conference in Reedley, California, was scheduled for early November, they celebrated their anniversary early, on October 29.

David Ewert and George Thielmann, a brother-in-law, spoke, the College Choir sang, and Elfrieda made a few remarks on behalf of the children. John reflected briefly on twenty-five years of married life, mentioning the trials as well as the joys. He was particularly cognizant of the fact that Nettie's health had improved markedly since 1956, when she first began ailing. Elfrieda, the oldest of the five children, intimated in her speech that although father might lay down the rules for the family, mother was usually left to carry them out. What she did not say, but implied, was that the children found mother more approachable than father. Father was the public figure, but in the home mother had a lot of authority.

Nettie accompanied John to Reedley following their anniversary celebration. This was the first long trip they had ever taken without the children and the trip by train to California was a time of rejuvenation for both. Nettie was able to meet other wives whose husbands were also involved in Conference work. In 1960 there were very few women who were active in the Conference except as foreign missionaries.

John had been asked to deliver one of the main Conference messages and chose as his topic, "Christ's Challenge to Reorientation and Restoration", using Revelation 3:3 and Colossians 2:6 as a basis for his message. Ever the historian, John, in his introduction, warned against unwholesome optimism since religious movements are subject to the laws of spiritual decline and deterioration. He also warned against unscriptural pessimism, as the Spirit of God can revive the weak and the feeble. He then went on to show that the new life movement of 1860 could not be explained merely in terms of cause and effect, or in terms of

economic and social conditions, but that the perspective of faith was involved. He also made comparisons between 1860, the year of Mennonite Brethren beginnings at Elizabethtal, and 1960, and intimated that some of the changes which had occurred were more than just cultural in nature and touched the very essence of Mennonite Brethren faith.

In the main body of the address he reexamined MB concepts of salvation, separation and scriptural authority. The early Brethren understood salvation as a conversion accompanied by a radical change of life. This was also the position of the early Anabaptists. The concept at the heart of 1860 renewal had been influenced by various factors. As in any religious movement, the third generation often loses the essence of a dynamic faith and retains only its form. Converts of the third generation come from Christian homes and often repeat the religious jargon without knowing the true experience. John referred to the writer Basil Willey who had pointed out that members of the second generation have a shadow of the religious experience of their parents and the third generation has only the shadow of a shadow. Then he cited emphases on childhood conversion and mass evangelism as two other factors which had influenced the MB understanding of salvation and which presented dangers. The concept of separation of the early brethren was evident in the "Document of Secession" of January 6, 1860, and also in the uncompromising position towards the false freedom movement and its excesses. There was a new emphasis on discipleship and purity of life. The purpose of the concept was to meet the problems of a rural agricultural community (a *Bauernethik*) but changes in language, in vocation, and in community patterns had greatly influenced the concept. Materialism and secularism had made inroads. John called for the church to stand against the world in order to save the world, and pleaded for unity in regard to ethical principles as well as doctrinal issues.

John went on to say that the concept of scriptural authority of 1860 was known as "radical biblicism." The early MBs were disciples of the Word. Yet various religious movements had influenced the MB view of Scripture in the hundred years that

followed. Hyper-Calvinism emphasized the sovereignty of God at the expense of human freedom; hyper-fundamentalism emphasized doctrine at the expense of ethics; and hyper-dispensationalism divided and dissected Scripture, destroying its unity.

Social pressures have robbed us of our Biblicism in ethics; political views have influenced our view of church policy, of church principles, of church discipline. If we want to remain a New Testament church, we must be governed by the Word.

John ended his centennial address with a plea to the brotherhood to "remember and repent."¹⁴

John had a gift for analyzing the present in historical perspective. The state of the church in 1960, after one hundred years of existence, in his opinion, was critical. Some concurred with his centennial analysis but others were less concerned about the recovery of an Anabaptist vision and were much more attuned to what the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and apostles of church growth were advocating.

But even a few NAE leaders were beginning to see that the Mennonite stance on war could be an acceptable one. Just six months previously, on April 26, 1960, John had been invited by the NAE Commission on Social Action to present a paper on "The Christian and Armed Combat." However, of the fourteen who attended, ten were already sympathetic to the peace position and, consequently the session was not a great success.¹⁵ V. Raymond Edman, a former president of Wheaton College, though not present, was so impressed on reading the paper that he had the address printed in the *Alliance Witness*. As was his custom, John proceeded to develop his thesis using the Bible rather than philosophical or historical assumptions as his basis. His central thesis was "that those who submit unconditionally to the lordship of Jesus Christ in faith and life cannot participate in armed combat or war." There were those in his audience who felt that this was unrealistic, unpatriotic, even unAmerican. His reply to them was, "The views presented here may appear naive, utopian, unrealistic and

unworkable in the modern world; yet, in view of Christ's exemplary life, authoritative teaching and redemptive death, we humbly but strongly affirm, "Thither lies truth."¹⁶

P.C. Hiebert was particularly pleased with John's presentation: "I believe you did an outstanding job in presenting in brief form what was so important and vital."¹⁷ Since Hiebert was getting older and not as active as he once had been, he encouraged younger men to speak and act on important issues. He remarked: "It gives a person who is himself aging and passing out of active service a real satisfaction to know that younger, stronger men are stepping in to lead the forces for Christ and for righteousness."¹⁸

Affirmation for John's work also came from outside MB circles. Dr. Melvin Gingerich had been instrumental in having *True Nonresistance Through Christ* translated into Japanese in 1957. In 1960 he wrote that a Japanese evangelical pastor had delivered a series of radio sermons based on the book. The MB Mission Board had only reluctantly given permission for the translation and publication of the book. Gingerich wrote:

Brother Janzen of Hillsboro told me personally that this would have been the last book that they would have chosen from Mennonite authors from your brotherhood to have translated into Japanese because they somehow feel that since the Communists are stressing peace in Japan and in the Orient, that we should be quiet about the matter for fear that they will associate us with the Communists.¹⁹

There were also other (Old) Mennonites interested in his work in 1960. Pastor Charles Hostetter of Mennonite Broadcasts obtained permission to abridge *True Nonresistance Through Christ*, and published it as *The Way of Peace*. He distributed over 2000 copies through his radio ministry. Sometimes John felt like a prophet without honor in his own country. Only once, according to Nettie, did he suggest they join the (Old) Mennonites who, in his view, had a greater appreciation for their Anabaptist roots. This was at a point when he was particularly disheartened because of the views of some of the California brethren. But the subject was never mentioned again.

John spent the summers of 1959 and 1960 at the University of Minnesota. He and Victor Martens shared a room in the home of Frank H. Epp, who was completing his doctorate in journalism in 1960. Victor remembers the lively political discussions between John and Frank during the American election primaries. His only problem in having John as a roommate was John's habit of snoring the moment he hit the pillow while he (Victor) prayed for sleep.²⁰ In 1962 John, with the approval of the MBBC Board, took a leave of absence in the spring semester to complete his residency requirements. His major was Reformation history and he finally decided on a minor in philosophy of religion. A minor in economics or political science would have necessitated more courses but even philosophy gave him a few sleepless nights at "prelim" time.

At MBBC, accreditation for the Arts courses through an affiliation arrangement with Waterloo Lutheran University was achieved for the 1961-62 school year and the B.D. program was finally inaugurated a year later. What worried some members of the constituency was that perhaps affiliation indicated a new objective or purpose for the College. John did his best to allay such fears. In his report to the Board on January 25, 1963, he reiterated that MBBC's purpose remained the same, but that, "we are living in an age of rapid cultural, economic and educational change and a reorientation in our philosophy of Christian education, as well as rethinking of the program, to achieve the above objective is not only desirable but imperative."

F .C. Peters had been asked to write a paper on the MBBC philosophy of education, which he presented to the Board:

The liberal arts courses, or the general education programs are viewed in the Bible College setting both as cultural education, which all educated people should have, and as an understanding of the world in which and to which the Christian seeks to witness. It is not liberal arts courses and Bible College courses but rather one program toward a Bible College objective.²¹

The faculty unanimously agreed that the growing needs of the constituency at home and of the missionary task abroad necessitated such changes.

John had not attended the sixth Mennonite World Conference at Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1957, but at the seventh Conference in Kitchener, August 1-7, 1962, under the general theme "The Lordship of Christ," he gave a stirring address on "The Call to Bear Witness:"

We are living in a crucial hour of man's history. The Christian church at large has lost its influence on the masses of society, because it has accepted the ethical norms of that society. Its voice is no longer heard in prophetic dissent and criticism. The Lord of the church has called our Mennonite brotherhood to bear witness to the truth as it is in Christ 'for such a time as this.'²²

There were among his MB colleagues those who took issue with his strong support of the Mennonite World Conference. Were there not liberal European Mennonite theologians involved in the Conference? On one occasion F.C. Peters wrote a note to John regarding his active support of the Mennonite World Conference and concluded with the words: "I always allow my brethren the full right to be wrong in their views."²³

H.S. Bender had been influential in framing a constitution for the Mennonite World Conference and John wholeheartedly agreed with the stated purpose of its conventions. Their purpose was:

to bring the Mennonites of the world together in regularly recurring meetings of brotherly fellowship ... to strengthen for them the awareness of the world-wide brotherhood in which they stand. By its recurring sessions the conference seeks, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, to deepen faith and hope, and to stimulate and aid the church in its ministry to the world; that is, in greater obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the promotion of His kingdom in the world.²⁴

Over 12,000 persons registered at the Kitchener Conference, with 500 coming from outside North America from 25 different

countries. John was elected to the Presidium as a representative of the Mennonite Brethren, for the Eighth Conference to be held in Amsterdam in 1967. Although H.S. Bender was already very ill with cancer and died five weeks after the 1962 Conference, he was present to give a moving closing prayer.

On his return from Kitchener, John and Nettie visited H.S. Bender in Goshen, Indiana. Bender was especially apologetic about an oversight on his part regarding John's thesis topic. When John had enquired about a suitable topic in the field of Anabaptist history, Bender had suggested a topic pertaining to economics. Apparently he had also suggested the same topic to another scholar who had started his work earlier than John.

Bender, more than any other scholar, influenced John's theological views. His *Anabaptist Vision* spurred John to write his BD thesis on the Anabaptist concept of the church. In personal encounters he encouraged John to keep on promoting the cause of Anabaptism despite the repercussions he often felt within the Mennonite Brethren Conference. Once he remarked to Abe J. Klassen that "J.A. is bringing new light to the MBs."²⁵

John was impressed with Bender's sympathetic understanding of the various branches of the Mennonite faith and felt that he had rendered the Mennonite Brethren Church a great service by objectively analyzing and evaluating the 1850s revival movement in Russia which led to the founding of the MB Church. John felt that no denominational bias or bigotry distorted his rendering of the facts.²⁶ Bender, however, expressed to John and others his concern about certain trends in the MB Church, concerns which John shared. In his tribute to Bender John wrote:

Harold S. Bender's voice in our world-wide brotherhood was not merely the voice of a historian; it was also, and even more so, the voice of a prophet who called his people to repentance and restoration.²⁷

This is what John also viewed as his task.

When John returned to the College after the World Conference, he did some reevaluating. Although he still enjoyed

teaching, he was beginning to find the administrative duties a burden. As a result he sent in his letter of resignation to the Board on December 10, 1962, indicating that he felt his strength was teaching and that he would gladly continue in that capacity should the Board so desire. Jacob Quiring was appointed President and John went back to teaching and to completing his PhD program. Victor Adrian joined the faculty in 1962. There were those in the constituency who voiced their concern about appointing a graduate of a Presbyterian seminary who had once argued the Reformed position on infant baptism. The Chairman of the Board, the Dean and the President interviewed him, however, and were convinced that he "fully identifies himself with our MB position on major doctrines of theology."²⁸ One letter sharply reprimanded the choice:

While at Bible College I quite frequently heard our Fresno seminary being downgraded for its Dallas graduates, but this choice seems scarcely better except that in our eyes it may appear a little more intellectually respectable.... I believe you are tending to come out of contact with the needs of our churches."²⁹

If there were stresses and strains in the early and mid-sixties at MBBC regarding direction and purpose, there were also stresses and strains in the Toews home. No family with teenagers in those years avoided such tensions. Although nonresistance was espoused by the whole household, verbal combat frequently occurred at the dinner table where every possible topic of world or local import was discussed. On one occasion sticky homemade noodles got involved, but this was an exception. If the topic was political, there was not too much disagreement as John, Nettie and the children tended to be liberal in their views. Stanley Knowles, of the New Democratic Party, a dignified parliamentarian and an advocate of human rights, represented their district and on several occasions John and Nettie cast their vote with the NDP. There was not always unanimity in voting and John and Nettie may have differed in their vote (Nettie tended to be more liberal). John certainly did not tell Nettie how she should vote; Nettie had very definite opinions of her own. On

cultural and social issues there tended to be greater differences between John and Nettie, and the children. Although the children wanted to buy a television set, John and Nettie refused till 1964, after the eldest two had left home. Movies were taboo and casual dating was not encouraged. When Elfrieda was a member of an MCC summer service unit at a mental hospital, the psychiatrist, who had to interview all workers, was surprised that she had never thrown her Mennonite heritage overboard in reaction to her upbringing. But in the Winnipeg Mennonite milieu such an upbringing was not unusual at the time.

With parental encouragement, Elfrieda left for a two and a half year Mennonite Central Committee teaching assignment in Nigeria in July, 1963. One MCC volunteer of MB background flippantly remarked that the perfect will of God was to go out under the Mission Board, the good to go under Christian service auspices, the acceptable to go under MCC and filthy lucre to go into government overseas service. John and Elfrieda travelled together as far as Chicago, as John was enroute to Goshen to research the thesis topic he had finally chosen: "Sebastian Franck: Friend and Critic of Early Anabaptism."

The University of Minnesota Department of History did not often enrol students as old as John or those with a ministerial background. His advisor, Dr. Ralph Giesey, wrote:

I might say overall, that your proclivity to homiletic organization has worked much more for you than it may seem to have worked against you; you have separated categories of thought and analysis very well, and it is just a literary trick to make it flow rather than be dammed up in short stretches.³⁰

Before his graduation on June 13, 1964, in the company of Nettie, son John and daughter Irene, Giesey gave him the following accolade:

For a man of your age to get a PhD is very unusual. We often discourage, even disbar elder graduate students for experience has taught that they lack the enthusiasm and

open-mindedness, and are beset by fixed convictions which make them inflexible to the revelations of higher scholarship and/or too stubborn to be dealt with in the authoritarian situation of professor and student. None of these usual conditions prevailed in our relationship, and it is almost embarrassing to me to have been the advisor of a student whom I helped so little but who did so well. That is to say, great credit reflects on all scores upon you. Now the ultimate criticism of having the elderly students is open: it cannot bring much "they" say, to the world of scholarship, because the person does not have the drive (let alone the time) to produce much. But, I know you have the drive and at least a score of years of active life ahead. You have another clear advantage over younger scholars: you are not naive or vainglorious. You have sensed the joy in work, scholarly work, which is the Erasmian ideal. I hope you find it possible to make this a large part of your life.³¹

After living at 375 Donalds for ten years, John and Nettie purchased a home at 108 Rowandale in September of 1964. Of all the homes they lived in, it was Nettie's favorite: comfortable but not ostentatious, and close to the busline for the many times John was absent and could not drive her (Nettie didn't drive). John, Nettie and David transferred their membership to the North Kildonan MB Church, which was now in close proximity, but the oldest three children retained their memberships in the Elmwood MB Church.

An increasing pessimism about Conference institutions in the mid-sixties, a period marked generally by perplexity, doubt and shifting values, also infected MBBC. Frank C. Peters left in June of 1965 to accept a Kitchener pastorate, for him a new challenge. Victor Martens, music director, also resigned. John personally was disappointed that the BD program attracted so few students. He was also disheartened by frequent criticism of his inter-Mennonite stance. Frank Epp wrote: "John, I hear sometimes, I hope falsely, that you are being sidelined in your brotherhood because of your inter-Mennonite activity and some of your non-orthodox views. I would hope that your courageous witness on some questions in recent days has not really had that effect."³² John was the

Mennonite Brethren representative on the MCC Peace Section (1964-1972) as well as on the MCC Canada Board. William Snyder, Executive Secretary of MCC at the time, recalls that John was the person to whom he would turn for an interpretation of Mennonite Brethren views and that he (John) helped him to follow "a thread of rationality in the various Mennonite Brethren activities."³³

The exact occasion cannot be recalled but Nettie remembers that on one occasion John returned from a meeting in California where someone had referred to him as the "Canadian Krushchev." They were probably referring to his stubbornness as well as to his ideas, which some of the more right-wing MBs thought were tinged by communism.

John was in need of a change and when the MCC Peace Section approached him in 1964 about a European assignment, he felt this might be the change he was looking for. In a letter to Edgar Metzler he wrote: "Through the years I have felt that as Anabaptists and Mennonites we are under special obligation to other Evangelicals and Pietists with regard to our teaching of nonresistance and Christian discipleship."³⁴ The details of the assignment were to be worked out in Europe. H.H. Janzen wrote from St. Chrischona, Switzerland that John would not be able to speak on peace issues at that institution (where he was teaching) for fear it would cause controversy among the nationalistic Swiss. Of the twenty schools contacted by Marlin Miller, only four responded positively, and so the assignment was reluctantly dropped in December of 1965. John was disappointed but wrote to Marlin Miller and Edgar Metzler: "In my service in the Kingdom of God, through the years I have discovered that the Lord controls the "red light" as well as the "green light" on our pathway."³⁵

In the meantime the Board of Reference and Counsel of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America had requested that John go to South America for the meetings of the Mennonite World Conference Presidium and, following that, minister to the churches. The Presidium of the Mennonite World Conference met in Paraguay from July 2 to 11 but John left on May 3 and returned on August 3. Enroute to Uruguay, his first major stop, he visited briefly with Mennonite Brethren missionaries and Christian service

workers in Cali, Columbia; Quito, Ecuador; and Lima, Peru. The major portion of his time, however, was given to ministry in the churches and to Christian workers conferences. A number of days were also devoted to a special assignment he shared with J.H. Franz in Brazil to review the role of the orphanage and the possibility of establishing closer relations between the mission, missionaries and the MB Conference in Brazil.³⁶

After an absence of fifteen years, John had an opportunity to study development and progress in Brazil and Paraguay. Some settlements such as Bage, Brazil, which had been in an early pioneer stage in 1951, now featured large, attractive homes and farm buildings as well as beautiful orange and grapefruit orchards. Asuncion, formerly on the periphery of church concern in Paraguay, had moved to the center as young people increasingly came to the city for university training and professional employment. In Asuncion John was asked to give a lecture on "New Wineskins for Old Wine," the provocative treatise published by Delbert Wiens in 1965. Wiens pointed out some of the church's deficiencies, especially the problems of expecting the perpetuation of early Mennonite Brethren religious experiences under vastly different conditions.³⁷ He was also asked to lecture on the MB Church and the ecumenical movement, a topic which, like the former, was current in North America as well.

Fifteen years previously, the only way into the Paraguayan Chaco had been by plane; in 1966 there was the Chaco Highway. It meant easier access to markets and services for the Mennonites, but it also meant easier access for Asuncion and the rest of Paraguay to the colonies. John noted that not all the imports were positive; some of the new influences caused concern.³⁸

John considered the ministers' course at Neuland in Paraguay one of the highlights of the summer. Of the eighty-four registered participants only thirty-two were Mennonite Brethren, fifteen of whom came from the Menno Colony. He would have considered this phenomenon inconceivable in 1951. In a brief visit to the Menno Colony, John noted tremendous social, cultural and religious changes. There was a growing interest in education and among many of the ministers of the more conservative Sommerfelder

Church there was a concern for a deeper spiritual life. These factors were setting in motion forces that could revolutionize the traditional pattern of life in the colony.³⁹

John always returned from foreign travel tired, yet in a sense rejuvenated by the work he had done. The first wedding in the family took place on September 3, 1965, when son John married Eleanor Wall, with whom he had attended church, high school and College. On August 20, 1966, Elfrieda was married to Wayne Nafziger, an (Old) Mennonite, who had done research for his PhD thesis in Nigeria, where Elfrieda had been on an MCC teaching assignment. The nest was gradually emptying. Wilma had accepted a job teaching high school in Vancouver. John and Eleanor moved to Boston in the fall of 1966 so that John could pursue PhD studies in history at Harvard University. Elfrieda and Wayne moved to Manhattan, Kansas, where Wayne had accepted a teaching position at Kansas State University. By September of 1966 only David, attending United College, and Irene, in grade 7, were still at home.

In March of 1966 John had requested a leave of absence for the 1967-68 academic year. He had expressed his reason for such a leave in these words: "I am deeply convinced that for an effective ministry in the future, a change from my present routine of my work of teaching is imperative."⁴⁰ He was interested in a one-year assignment with the Mission Board. In December, 1966, he changed his request to resignation. At the General Conference in Corn, Oklahoma, in November, he had been approached by members from the Frasersview M.B. Church who were looking for a pastor, and he had indicated some interest. This was not the first time he had been approached about taking a pastorate. There had been numerous inquiries over the years but until now he had always maintained that his place was at MBBC. Perhaps he was suffering from burnout. Certainly the tensions among faculty members intensified his determination to leave. When Victor Adrian was chosen as President-elect in January, 1967, he knew he would feel better leaving. John was particularly concerned about the direction the school might take under Adrian's direction. In a letter to J.H. Quiring he wrote: "If the College is to be a training school for the ministry in our churches, then we need more men on the staff who

have pastoral experience and who are deeply rooted in our church and conference life."⁴¹ After the Corn, Oklahoma, Convention John came home, talked with Nettie and then wrote the Frasersview Church that he would be willing to be considered as candidate for the pastorate should there be a vote of at least 80% in his favor. In January Wilmer Kornelson replied that after an evening communion service a vote had been taken, and 74% of those voting were in favor of his coming.⁴²

The letter came as a disappointment, but after he and Nettie had prayed about it, he wrote: "In view of the relatively large negative vote I regret to inform you that we do not have the inner liberty under these conditions to give a positive response to your call."⁴³ In the meantime the Search Committee had reconvened and asked the membership, "How many would, in light of the call having been issued by a majority decision, now support the church in the call and receive and support (his) ministry if (he) came to serve in Frasersview?" The tally was now 96% in favor.

John, in later years, was questioned whether he had missed the will of God on the occasion of his accepting the Frasersview pastorate. John never entertained such an idea. Problems might arise but he saw these as challenges. He had never been a fulltime pastor, yet he had been teaching candidates for the ministry for twenty years. The position at Frasersview Church would allow him to gain new experiences and share some of the problems facing the church in an urban setting.

At the closing program of MBBC in the spring of 1967, not a word was mentioned about John's resignation after a twenty-year tenure at the school. Apparently the College administration feared the announcement would result in bad publicity for the school and perhaps even affect enrolment adversely. This hurt John deeply since he really cared for the school — no words of thanks when he had given the best years of his life to the institution. Mr. and Mrs. C.A. DeFehr, also upset by the administration's actions, hosted a dinner for board and faculty members at the Fort Garry Hotel one week after graduation, honoring John and Nettie for their work at the College.

They sold the house at 108 Rowandale and sent the contents to Vancouver to be stored for a year in the basement of the manse at Fraserview. Before beginning his pastorate, John was to spend a year serving MB churches in Germany, and teaching several short sessions at the Bienenberg Bible School.

6

Interlude

In July, John, Nettie and Irene first flew to Montreal for a tour of Expo '67, and then on to Amsterdam to attend the Mennonite World Conference, where John was a delegate and a member of the Presidium. For John such inter-Mennonite gatherings were a source of encouragement and hope. He knew that there were those of liberal theological persuasion in attendance, but this did not deter him from fellowshiping with a host of delegates with an Anabaptist heritage. Since John and Nettie could not make satisfactory arrangements for Irene to attend an English-language school, she took classes by correspondence and John marked the tests and sent in periodic reports. Of all the children Irene, perhaps because she was the youngest, developed the closest relationship with her father. Since Irene was the only one to accompany John and Nettie to Europe, she was almost like an only child.

Kaiserslautern was the first base of operation after the World Conference. Since the B.J. Brauns, missionaries sent by the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions, were on a six-month furlough, John and Nettie had the use of their apartment and car. From here John travelled to Heidelberg, Neustadt, Lage, Neuwied and other towns for meetings. At Heidelberg, John and Irene climbed to the top of the steeple to view the city. At Cologne they raced to the top of the dome while Nettie stayed in the Cathedral.

For one week in September, John participated in a seminar for ministers and theology students from Mennonite churches. John wrote as follows to Henry Brucks of the Mission Board:

For me this was an invaluable experience, since I learned to know practically all the Mennonite ministers, as well as a number of their prominent theology students.... I have also received valuable insights into the problems that these churches face, and how they endeavor to meet them. I especially appreciated the serious concern that some of these men have for genuine spiritual renewal.¹

Brucks's reply refers to an interesting and perceptive insight voiced by outsiders regarding the European Mennonite Brethren mission work.

Just recently it was remarked that we as Mennonite Church and Conference have possibly failed in seeking to revive life within the churches in Europe. The remark was made that we are much too concerned about the establishing of our own Mennonite Brethren churches and leaving the other Mennonite and other evangelical churches untouched. It would appear to me, from your report of the ministry to the seminar for preachers, that this is indicative of the fact that we tried again and again to minister in various ways to churches that are not of the Mennonite Brethren fold.²

After a series of meetings in a number of small Mennonite Brethren churches wherein he also did a lot of counselling, he found teaching at the European Mennonite Bible School in Bienenberg, Switzerland, a welcome respite. The School, founded on the initiative of Harold S. Bender in 1950, was supported by MCC as well as by the various Mennonite conferences. John taught two three-week sessions: from November 13 to December 2, and from January 15 to February 3. The first session was preceded by a one-week ministers retreat. The School was located in one of Europe's most scenic spots and young students came from all over Europe and even Canada and the United States to take several short-term Bible courses. Samuel Gerber, the Director of the Bienenberg School, was affectionately called "Uncle Sammy" by the students, and there was a feeling of camaraderie among faculty and students. On one occasion when John had scheduled a test, several students placed a couch in front of his door and strung chocolates

over the door. It was to no avail — they still had to take the test and John had a good laugh.³

Teaching close to Basel afforded John the once-in-a-life-time opportunity of sitting in on several seminars with Karl Barth. According to Irene, John felt Barth had changed a lot from his writing as a younger man; now he tended to be more conservative and evangelical.⁴ A special treat for Nettie and Irene, as well as for John, were the visits with the Paul Hofers and Paul's parents, who had a large *Bauernhof* (farm) near Basel. The elder Hofers were so pleased with the hospitality extended to Paul and Heidi during their studies in Winnipeg at MBBC that they were more than generous in repaying the kindness.

One of John's favorite pastimes was walking. Since Nettie's health was often precarious, Irene and her father went on many walks, around the mountain, or up to the castle or down into the valley. Up on the Schilthorn, at 10,000 feet, they threw snowballs at each other. For Irene's birthday in December, John gave her a Mem Sim watch, named after Menno Simons, and manufactured in a small Swiss Mennonite factory in the mountains.

Weekends in Switzerland were spent in various churches and John also had the opportunity to speak to some of the German-speaking churches in the Alsace. In one Mennonite farm home in the Alsace the host related how the Americans had taken over their farm during World War II. There were still bullets lodged in the walls. In the Jura Mountains, in a very narrow canyon just above the snowline, they viewed an Anabaptist meeting cave, a visual reminder of the time when Anabaptists were persecuted.

On the last morning at Bienenberg there was a chocolate bar hanging before the door with the following Bible verse on it: "*Und Joseph fuellte die Scheune fuer die sieben hungrige Jahre*" (And Joseph filled the granary for the seven lean years).⁵

John and Nettie were delighted to receive a letter from David in January. David, after wandering through Europe, had joined a group travelling by jeep from Istanbul, Turkey to Kathmandu, Nepal. In Calcutta he had contacted the MCC Center where Vernon Reimer was director. MCC just happened to be very much

in need of help for some agricultural projects, and although David did not have any real agricultural experience, he volunteered to help for six months. John and Nettie were much relieved to hear this for they had been rather anxious about David. In the late sixties there were many "seekers" wandering about Europe and Asia trying to find identity and purpose. In their opinion, MCC personnel would provide a good antidote to such influences.

John and Nettie, while serving under the Mission Board, received a living allowance of \$200 a month. They managed to save some money so that John could take the trip to Greece and Israel that he had so much wanted to take in 1952 when he had attended the World Conference. He informed the Board of Missions that since he would not be working for them during the ten days of the trip, they could deduct a corresponding amount from his salary (a gesture typical of him). Visiting the biblical sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Hebron and Capernaum was a spiritual experience for John. Passages of Scripture took on new meaning. He was disappointed with the crass commercialism evident at some of the "holy" spots. The fact that he was a "soft touch" when confronted with someone with a hardluck story, led to the fleecing of his pocket several times.⁶

John's historical background made him truly appreciate the tour of ancient Greek sites of culture, and in his diary he commented: "This fact has depressed me, that Christians have often been the destroyers of culture."⁷ The two-week trip ended with a visit to the MCC unit on the island of Crete. The fellowship with young people serving in the name of Christ was a renewing experience for him.

From the end of March to the beginning of June his work consisted mainly of evangelistic meetings and weekend Bible conferences, including a conference on the beautiful Attersee. One day while at the Attersee, John, Nettie and Irene walked to a neighboring village. Irene, then in Grade 8, wrote the following description in her diary:

Mom, Dad and I walking to Steinbach. It was wonderful — walking along a small winding road over lush green

hillsides, cattle grazing peacefully, the tinkle of bells in the wind, daisies, pansies and golden bells fluttering in the wind — on the one side the majestic Hallengebirge, towering up into the sky with the Teufelsloch where the sky devil drove through his mother-in-law; on the other side the glassy blue depths of the Attersee reflected the green hillsides with the antique Bauernhoeefe scattered here and there. A once-in-a-lifetime experience!

John, Nettie and Irene developed a special closeness through all these experiences. Irene was taken aback when, in 1979 at John's funeral, someone remarked, "But I know that J.A. had only four children," for during the last years she had seen more of her parents than any of her siblings.

If there was a message John wanted to send to the MB Mission Board, it was a plea for more cooperation with other Mennonites:

I firmly believe that such cooperation should be mutually beneficial. Our own conference in Europe is small and weak, and needs to cultivate a fellowship with other evangelical bodies. I believe that the Swiss and South German Mennonites, as well as the German-speaking Mennonites of France, are the closest to us in faith and practice. The work in Vienna will provide an opportunity for closer fellowship with the Mennonites of Switzerland.⁸

Since many Mennonite Brethren supported mass evangelism by nondenominational teams in Europe, John felt that he should point out some of the problems attending such efforts, such as follow-up and church affiliation. He definitely believed that more church-based evangelism was needed.⁹

Although there had been an offer to lecture at the Associated Mennonite Seminaries, Elkhart, for the fall semester of 1968-69, John and Nettie had set their eyes firmly on Vancouver, British Columbia. June 16 had been designated Welcome Day at the Fraserview MB Church. After speaking at an MB ministers' conference at Kaiserslautern in early June, they packed up and arrived in Vancouver without taking even a brief holiday.

John had agreed to take the pastorate even before he saw the conditions of service or salary, but he was always of the opinion that

the brotherhood should adequately look after its ministers. Financially he would have been better off teaching, as the pastor's salary was \$7500 a year with \$125 a month deducted as rent for the manse. The first year he was entitled to two weeks vacation plus one week for other ministry and in the second and third year two weeks vacation plus two weeks for ministry. There were a number of affluent businessmen, members of the Frasersview congregation, who gave him occasional donations, but John would have preferred an adequate salary. He never wanted to feel beholden to anyone or have people suggest that his messages could be affected by such gifts.

In John's acceptance letter he had intimated how he would view his role as pastor:

For me the Church is a brotherhood, a company of committed disciples, who unitedly serve their living Lord. Hence I look upon the pastor not only as the one who serves the Church, but as the one that serves the Lord in close cooperation with all members of the Church. In this spirit we would like to accept the call and the assignment.¹⁰

Although John had taught aspiring pastors for years, he had not become fully aware of the many demands of the pastorate until now. The many needs of the older members, the youth, the families, the sick, the alienated and the seeking, almost overwhelmed him. The Sunday expository sermons were the dessert — the aspect of the job he was most familiar with and most confident about. It appeared to him that some days were altogether taken up with meetings. Business meetings, however necessary for operating a church, were not his strength, and he was always relieved when they were over.

For the family, being a part of the Frasersview community caused some real culture shock after being involved with European missions for a year. Some church members were obviously affluent, although there were also families struggling to make ends meet. David, returning from Asia in time for Christmas of 1968, was very much aware of the concentration of wealth after being involved with the very poor in Bihar, India, in the MCC project. One parishioner remarked that she felt that David, with his long hair, sandals, and

medallion derived a certain satisfaction from sitting next to someone in the pew with a modish suit and fur jacket.

The late sixties were difficult years for many parents, and John and Nettie found that they also had to make adjustments. Although the older children espoused basic Anabaptist beliefs, their expression of these beliefs differed from that of their parents. John never participated in a protest march but several of the children felt compelled to be a part of anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. John was also faced with the issue of draft resistance when he came into contact with a number of resisters in the Vancouver area. To the consternation of some of the parishioners, he invited several resisters over for dinner and came to appreciate their stance. The church, basically conservative, did not wish to be involved with any controversial causes, particularly if social issues were involved. It was much easier to gain the consent of the church council to participate in an evangelistic crusade than in a cause promoting peace and social justice.

Speaking from the same pulpit every Sunday was a challenge, but John missed the weekend ministry to other churches, to which he had become accustomed. In the summer of 1969, a trip to Zaire to attend the Presidium meetings of the Mennonite World Conference was welcome respite. John and Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Hein were the Mennonite Brethren representatives. Not only did they participate in the Presidium meetings in Kinshasa, but they also spent over a week in the interior visiting the Mennonite Brethren and the Congo Inland Mission stations. The fact that John's sister, Mary, had spent twenty years in Zaire added a special dimension to his visit. Names like Kafumba, Kikwit and Kajiji had been a part of his vocabulary for years. Following the Kwila River with a small Missionary Aviation Fellowship plane did cause some apprehension, however, when the pilot discovered he had made the wrong turn and was following the Kivendu instead of the Kwila River. An about-turn was made and the eventual landing posed no problems. Most of the landscape they flew over was a thick jungle forest with occasional burned-over areas. John was told that burning cleared the ground of snakes and helped the natives catch exhausted animals to bolster their food supply.¹¹

At Kikwit the Heins and John witnessed a triple wedding; in Kajiji the regional governor presented them with eleven eggs. Wherever they went, fellowship with the missionaries was the main item on the agenda. There were devotionals but also lively discussions about the changing cultural and theological climate in America. Often missionaries felt very much cut off from the mainstream when involved in village evangelism, and therefore had difficulty adjusting when they returned to America. They had not been a part of the "changing" process and often found the changes difficult to accept. The changes were usually ethical rather than theological — issues like divorce, movies and drinking.

Kafumba (meaning nest of elephants) was also on the itinerary. It was a tour of ruins — ruins caused by the destructive forces of the civil war which followed independence in 1960. Apparently, Kafumba Christians had participated in the civil war but were later repentant and asked for forgiveness. The church, secondary school, residences, maternity ward and print shop were no longer operational — a very depressing sight, and a reminder of the convulsive forces that had wracked the young nation. At Mukedi, a stop between Nyanga, a major Congo Inland Mission complex, and Kikwit, over fifty percent of the Christians had lost their lives in the civil strife.

John's cross-cultural acid test came after a ladies meeting in Kikwit. He and the Heins were special guests at a luncheon where the main dish was lukó (pounded and mashed manioc root) served with a hot sauce containing fish, rabbit and caterpillars. John did not finish his first small helping — he had lost all appetite. The hostesses were nevertheless gracious — perhaps it was not his custom to eat such a dish. White foreigners had some strange customs.¹² The Presidium meetings in Kinshasa, chaired by Million Belete of Ethiopia, were an enriching experience. Reports from Indonesia and Zaire, he later noted, "transport us back to the early church in Acts."¹³ God was at work in the larger brotherhood. Prayer meetings sometimes involved five or six languages. There were discussions about whether the political climate of Brazil would allow for freedom of speech at the next World Conference in 1972. Non-European and non-American members were especially anxious

to have the meetings in a third world country and it was agreed that the Brazil venue would stand despite the problems this might create.

The days passed all too quickly and soon departure time was at hand. Enroute to Vancouver, John spent a weekend in Neuwied with the Roland Marsches. This was followed by a brief visit with the John Wielers in Frankfurt, and a meeting with G.W. Peters, Gerhard Janz, John Klassen and others regarding MB mission work in Europe. After several hours of discussion, John commented: "We do not seem to be any nearer to a solution of the European problem.... Closer working and fellowship relationships with other groups seem to be advisable."¹⁴

John had been at the Fraserview Church less than a year when the Board of Christian Literature invited him to write a definitive history of the Mennonite Brethren Church. In the late forties J.H. Lohrenz had written *The Mennonite Brethren Church*, and in 1954 *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde* by A.H. Unruh was published. The history of our Church needed to be brought up-to-date since the period after 1945 had been one of great change and growth in North America. Also, since Unruh's history was written in German, the younger generation did not have access to it. John felt, however, that an even more important reason was that, although the sources of historical material remained basically unchanged, the questions writers brought to these sources varied from one generation to the next. The changing social and cultural needs of the decades following World War II made a new treatment of the sources desirable.¹⁵

John knew it was a formidable task which would require a concentrated period of time:

I believe we expect too much of our brethren when we give them an assignment of this magnitude, which they are to complete in their "free time" as an "extra-curricular" activity. J.B. Toews was unable to do this and F.C. Peters has also not been able to write a book "on the run." Although I am not disinclined to tackle such an assignment, I feel that under the present circumstances I would only repeat the experience of the other brethren. In other

conferences brethren are occasionally given a "sabbatical" to undertake a significant conference project. Perhaps we will have to explore similar possibilities. I regret that in view of the problem indicated above I am unable to accept the assignment.¹⁶

Since he had promised to stay at the Fraserview Church at least three years, there was no question of terminating early, but he did begin to consider seriously whether he was interested in the pastorate or in other areas of Christian work. In October of 1969, several months later, he wrote to a friend: "Although I have enjoyed and do appreciate many aspects of the pastoral ministry, I believe it will be only an 'interlude'. If the Lord should open a door back into the teaching ministry, I would seriously consider such a prospect."¹⁷

The fifty-first General Conference of MB Churches held its sessions in Vancouver, August 23 to 26, 1969. Marvin Hein was elected moderator and John, assistant moderator. One of the controversial issues at the session was Mennonite Brethren participation in the publication of *With*, an inter-Mennonite paper for young people. *With* was rejected despite the recommendation of the Board of Christian Literature. When John received a letter of castigation from a young brother after the session, he replied:

May I assure you that I share some of the concerns expressed in your letter, and that I am also unhappy about some of the things that happened at the Vancouver Conference. Before the joint session of the boards I pled for the endorsement of the recommendation of our Board of Christian Literature regarding *With* magazine. I regret that I was not sufficiently versed on specific articles that have appeared in *With*, and I was thus not in a position to refute specific charges that were made against the magazine on the conference floor. I voted for the acceptance of the recommendation, but I found myself in a small minority. In my message to the Canadian Council of Boards on January 1st of this year I expressed my regret at the action taken on this issue at the conference and related it to our denominational pride and our spiritual "Phariseeism." I think the message bore fruit because in later business

sessions the Council of Boards agreed to cooperate in the production of a *History of the Canadian Mennonites* — a project that had been turned down a year earlier.¹⁸

A long-cherished dream to visit the Soviet Union was realized in March of 1970, when John was asked to be a member of a Baptist-Mennonite delegation to the Soviet Union. The invitation had been extended by the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists. Jacob Fast, Novosibirsk, and Victor Krieger, Moscow, represented the approximately 18,000 Mennonite Brethren affiliated with the All-Union Council. The dates of the visit, as well as the places on the itinerary, were determined by the Council.

Of the ten-member North American delegation, three were Mennonites: Rev. D.P. Neufeld, Chairman of MCC, Canada; Dr. John A. Lapp, Executive Secretary of the MCC Peace Section; and John, representing the Mennonite Brethren Conference. Even though his Russian was not fluent, John was able to utilize it in many different situations, establishing contacts more readily than those who had no Russian. Although he did not preach in Russian, he understood almost everything and usually gave a greeting in Russian.

The delegation, after two days of orientation at the Baptist Centre in Moscow, was divided into two groups, one visiting the western constituency of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists and the other visiting the eastern constituency. John and David Neufeld were assigned to the eastern tour and John Lapp to the western.

John's group, which also included Jacob Fast, Mennonite Brethren leader from Novosibirsk, first stopped at Volgograd, which had been rebuilt after being almost completely destroyed during the terrible siege of World War II. Provisions had been made for sightseeing and for visits and discussions with representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. The highlight of the stay, as was true also in the other cities, was the fellowship in the Baptist churches.

Here in Volgograd the Church was filled to overflowing. We marvelled at the patience and endurance of the people, many of them young people and children, as they listened

attentively for more than three hours to greetings, messages, and songs by the choir and the congregation. In some instances about one third of the congregation had to stand throughout the entire service. It was an unforgettable experience for us to share in such fellowship of believers and to bring these dear friends the gospel message of God's redemptive love. In our conversations with members of the Church we discovered that many listen regularly to the radio broadcasts of the Russian Gospel Light Hour and to other gospel programs in the Russian language.¹⁹

After a three-day stop in Tbilisi in the Georgian Republic, where they fellowshipped in a thriving, multi-national Baptist Church (Russians, Georgians and Armenians), they flew to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Here they were able to meet with several Mennonite leaders from the area, including Traugott Quiring from Dushanbe, and David Regehr from Tashemkent.

In Tashkent John also had the joy of seeing his cousin, Mrs. Agnes (Harms) Friesen, whom he had not seen for forty-four years. The time flew and soon they were on their way to Baku, their last stop before returning to Moscow.

The farewell service in Moscow will not be so easily forgotten — especially the communion services on Sunday, April 5. As we gathered around the Lord's table with perhaps 2000 believers in the large church, we became deeply conscious of our essential unity in Christ — in spite of cultural, political, social and linguistic differences.²⁰

As John reflected on the visit, he was convinced of the reality of Matthew 16:18: "I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." It was encouraging to see the emergence of new and younger leadership in the churches. He also felt the Russian Mennonite and Baptist churches had no generation gap — old and young worked together. He sensed a real desire on their part to become better acquainted with Evangelical Christians in other parts of the world, and wherever he went he noted a serious concern for world peace.²¹ Although being a member of an official delegation offered him only limited opportunities for

in-depth discussions, he nevertheless felt such visits were significant and should be continued.

On his return he gave reports in various churches and on May 15 he wrote David Neufeld that he had given nine reports. In the letter he observed:

Last night I was booed for the first time — and in Clearbrook of all places! A lady did not appreciate some positive comments I made concerning life in general in the USSR. We have here on the West Coast some strong believers in, and supporters of, "Underground Evangelism" and of Richard Wurmbrand.

Richard Wurmbrand claimed in his literature that the "Underground Church" was the only true church and that those who belonged to the registered churches were apostates. John realized that the rosy picture painted by some members of the All-Union Council was not the whole picture but he could not accept Wurmbrand's dogmatic statement either.²² At the B.C. Mennonite Brethren Convention held June 5-6, 1970, it was agreed that a cooperative arrangement between the Bethel Bible Institute (General Conference) and the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute, both of Clearbrook, was to be implemented in the fall of 1970. The classes were to be taught on one campus and the teachers engaged from each Conference were to be in proportion to the number of students from the respective schools. John had long pressed for such an agreement: "We believe that this is a step in the right direction and will lead to new manifestations of grace in our brotherhood. We cannot settle the questions of 1970 by constant reference to 1860."²³

John had been asked to write a paper on the doctrinal implications of inter-Mennonite cooperation in such a venture and the paper became a philosophical framework for the endeavour. Peter R. Toews, Principal of the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute, was sceptical about the arrangement at first, but later admitted: "John pled with me to give it a chance ... and my life has been enriched through working with the General Conference."²⁴

In Vancouver John tried to fellowship with pastors from the Mennonite churches and found this to be an enriching experience. The Board of Christian Literature, meanwhile, was still in contact with him about writing the history. By December of 1970, they had worked out a "Statement of Understanding". This statement, sent to John by A.J. Klassen, Secretary of the Board of Christian Literature, estimated that John would need six months to research and write the basic manuscript. Remuneration was set at \$6,000, to be paid in nine equal instalments, beginning on September 30, 1971 and ending on May 31, 1972.²⁵ Most scholars would be reluctant to write a history in six months, especially with other obligations. John would be attempting to do the impossible, but the task excited him and so he and Nettie sent in their letter of resignation to the Fraserview Church and prepared to move to Fresno for one year.

Not all the members of the Mennonite Brethren Conference Executive felt that such a book was necessary. Dan Friesen wrote, "I have felt a bit convicted that I mentioned the fact that I did not fully see the value of the book you have been asked to write. I want you to know that I support the project if it should be carried out.... I only felt that perhaps another book, which I would not read, is not what we need."²⁶ In the spring of 1971 John taught a course in North American Christianity at Regent College, Vancouver. He had been on the Board of Governors for the year 1969-70 and believed that the one-year program initiated in the fall of 1970 had real potential. The College was founded "to provide a serious introduction to Christian studies for those without formal theological training, and a continuing education for those already in Christian work."²⁷ A major objective was to help university students formulate a Christian worldview which could integrate their Christian faith with their professional training. The faculty at Regent College represented a variety of denominations, with the Plymouth Brethren playing a major role. The first Principal, James Houston, had been a lecturer at Oxford University, England.

John enjoyed the interchange with the other faculty members at Regent. Dr. Carl E. Armerding later remarked that he would represent the Reformed view and John the Anabaptist view.²⁸ It was a view that was gaining ever more adherents. During the late

1960s the Evangelicals discovered the Mennonites and their stance of nonresistance. Anabaptism became more popular — Mennonites had something to offer which other churches lacked. Until then Mennonites had kept more to themselves, but now they were more willing to be involved with other confessional groups.

John realized again how much he enjoyed the classroom. When an invitation came from the Vancouver Notre Dame High School to give a series of talks on Anabaptist beliefs, he was most happy to oblige. On February 15, 1971, enroute to the school to give a talk, the car he was driving collided with a bus. Fortunately no one was injured. Apparently John had had a blackout, but no specific causes were ever ascertained. He spent several days in the hospital for observation and then was released. In May a teacher from the Notre Dame School wrote:

The theological information you shared and the historical background you gave contributed to making my course a success.... The classes evaluated the whole program and felt it was very interesting and valuable to them. Knowing more about others helped them to appreciate the wholeness of truth and gave them a deeper affirmation of their own specific religious values.²⁹

Despite such assignments, John did not neglect the church and its needs. His goal was a caring, biblically-oriented community and this goal he worked toward constantly. One youth leader commented that John was the only pastor she knew who would make the effort to come out and greet the young people early in the morning when they were going out on an excursion. He also attended the church ball games and made every effort to appear at events sponsored by the young people, to show that he cared.³⁰ Irene, by now a teenager, did not always find it easy being the "preacher's kid." To be held up as an example is no teenager's dream.

In April 1971 David married Kathy Waltner, daughter of Erland and Winnie Waltner, of Elkhart. David and Kathy had met at Goshen College where both were students. John and Nettie came to the wedding by train. At one train stop the coffin of a Vietnam

soldier was unloaded and they could see the family out on the station platform. They were moved to tears as they observed the bereaved family's anguish. The occasion for their travel was a joyous family celebration, and so the contrast was very poignant.

In a brief meditation at the wedding, John emphasized the fact that his children seemed to be putting into practice his preaching on inter-Mennonite cooperation. Here was Mennonite Brethren David marrying General Conference Kathy whom he had met at an (Old) Mennonite Church College. These were indeed good omens for the church.

In May, 1971, MCC, the Council of Mission Board Secretaries, the Council of Mennonite Colleges, and the Council of Mennonite Seminaries sponsored a consultation at Bethel College on "The Christian Witness in the World of Conflict — Christian Identification with Third World Conflicts." John was asked to speak on "The Witness of Hope Amidst Conflict."

Our concept of an inaugurated eschatology which will be consummated by the personal appearance and intervention of Christ keeps us from hopeless pessimism, when our efforts to change the world meet with failure and frustration; this same eschatological perspective of history saves us from false optimism, when we are unable to record notable achievements and significant progress in evangelism and social action. This hope will produce a spirit of *Gelassenheit* (as the early Anabaptists called it), a spirit of quiet confidence in the providential rule of God.... I often become impatient with the Church for its lack of vision and concern but occasionally I also become impatient with the critics of the Church for their lack of proper conception of the supernatural character of the Church.... The triune God is at work in the world today through his people to accomplish his eternal redemptive purpose.³¹

Before resigning from the pastorate, John and Nettie considered carefully what to do after John's year of research and writing in Fresno. Both John and Nettie desired to return to Canada, and John hoped for a teaching position. He had had some contact with the faculty of Trinity Western in Langley and there was a distinct

possibility that this College might have a position open the following year. John had been involved in MB Conference institutions for so many years that he felt there might be an advantage in being an outsider looking in for a while. Since John's mother lived in Clearbrook and other relatives and friends resided there, they decided to invest in a house there before leaving for Fresno. Since house prices had not yet skyrocketed, they were able to buy a new home for less than \$25,000. They stored their furniture in the basement and rented out the house for one year.

In Fresno, John, Nettie and Irene moved into an apartment on the Seminary campus. This was convenient for John and his research and also for Irene who would attend Pacific College. Irene had just completed Grade 11, but by taking several extra courses during the spring semester, she was able to enrol as a freshman at Pacific College at the age of sixteen.

John was in his office at the Seminary by 8 a.m. and usually worked until 10 p.m., taking an hour each for lunch and supper. Since \$6,000 was not enough to support the family for a year, John also taught several courses in addition to working on the writing assignment, the major task at hand.

Early in September the Board of Christian Literature called a consultation forum to discuss the writing project. Elmer Martens and Abe J. Klassen of the Board of Christian Literature were present as well as Peter Klassen, J.B. Toews, Paul Toews, Delbert Wiens and I.G. Neufeld, who were to act as consultants. John wanted to have the consensus of those present on several major aspects such as scope, level of treatment, level of communication, methodology, etc. After some discussion it was decided that it should be "basically the story of Mennonite Brethren in North America, with some reference to South America and allusions to the third-world churches."³² However, it was to include Russian antecedents and also the Russian Mennonite Brethren story since World War I. It was to be written at a college reading level, with appropriate documentation. Whereas the Russian period was to be treated chronologically, the American period was to be dealt with topically, and some synthesizing chapters were to be added. Schisms

and negative materials were to be dealt with positively, and all this was to be accomplished in fewer than 400 pages.³³

Far from being disheartened by the task, John attacked it with his customary vigor. By December two instalments had been sent to manuscript readers at Hillsboro (Wesley Prieb, Clarence Hiebert, A.E. Janzen, Orlando Harms), Winnipeg (Harold Jantz, Abe Dueck), and Fresno (Delbert Wiens, Peter Klassen).

In a note to the manuscript readers on December 13, 1971, John expressed disappointment that only two of the readers had responded to the first instalment. The second instalment traced the story of the MB Church in Russia from 1865 to 1970. After consulting with the MCC office in Akron, he decided not to publish detailed information on the present status of the church in Russia since this could hurt the church. Instead, he relied mainly on the views of Krestyaninov, a Russian historian, who had unintentionally presented a rather positive picture of the Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren in Russia.

John considered the history of the brotherhood in North America the most difficult part of his assignment. It would not always be easy to see the forest for the number of trees.

Coffee breaks at the Seminary with Elmer Martens, Abe J. Klassen and others helped him as he focused on the task. Since he had been an active participant in many of the developments, it was not always easy to maintain a perspective of historical objectivity. The readers in Fresno, Hillsboro and Winnipeg also aided him in achieving the necessary balanced treatment. Some of the American readers detected a Canadian bias in his treatment of some of the issues. In the preface John remarks:

It has been my earnest endeavor to give an accurate and balanced account of developments in the MB Church. I have sought to honestly portray not only its vision, faith and achievements, but also its limitations, weaknesses and failures.... One thing I gladly admit ... I have written this history as one who has a loving concern for the brotherhood and a deep appreciation for its spiritual heritage.

He was particularly concerned about an objective analysis of the underlying causes and events that led to the secession of 1860 and of the relationship between the United States and Canadian Area Conferences.

The selection of materials was largely determined by the scope. Although the book was to deal primarily with the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, it was also to refer to the Church's European antecedents. Part 1 (European antecedents), to which P.M. Friesen had devoted 776 pages and A.H. Unruh 410 pages, had necessarily to be restricted to 100 pages. The consultation forum had also determined that developments at the local church level should be considered only insofar as they had significance for the larger brotherhood. This was true also with reference to the biographical sketches of church leaders.

There is no doubt that John, writing on the meaning of the 1860 secession, on the theological issues in the course of history, and especially on "understanding biblical revelation," reflected his own views based on the confessional and historical documents available. Since he considered the emergence of the new church in 1860 primarily a result of the "Great Awakening" of the 1850s and, therefore, a new life movement, he rejected the theory which claimed that the religious agitation and protest of the early brethren were mainly an extension of the economic problem. John also considered the new movement as basically Anabaptist. The concept of the believers church of the early brethren was a recovery of the "Anabaptist vision", in his opinion. The early brethren wanted to be neither Baptist nor Pietist, but Mennonite. The common Mennonite Brethren emphases on a radical emotional conversion, a literal interpretation of Scripture and legalism in ethics, were to John not a part of basic Mennonite Brethren theology, and Fundamentalism and Dispensationalism were movements that unfortunately weakened the historic Anabaptist foundations. But wishing something does not make it so and perhaps John pictured the Mennonite Brethren as being more Anabaptist and less influenced by outside movements than they actually were.³⁴

The task he had set himself was not finished at the end of May, and so, although John had made preliminary enquiries about

attending the Mennonite World Conference in Brazil with Nettie, he decided that he could not spare the time from his writing. He knew that once classes started in the fall at Trinity Western, he would have little spare time to write. There had been strong encouragement for John to remain at Fresno and teach at the Seminary and Pacific College. John was sixty years old, and he and Nettie had made a deliberate decision to remain in Canada when they bought the house in Clearbrook. When Trinity Western, a small interdenominational Junior College largely supported by the Evangelical Free Church, gave him a contract to teach, he felt this was a confirmation that he had made the right decision. To Dean Asa he wrote:

To work together with men who have a Christian view and a deep commitment to Christ and his kingdom is an experience to which I look forward with joy and anticipation. I also believe that the Evangelical Free Church and the Mennonite Brethren Church share a basic theological stance and evangelical vision which should make our fellowship not only possible but spiritually enriching and fruitful.³⁵

Although John had expressed interest in teaching some Bible courses, in the first year he was assigned two sections of History of Civilization, the History of the United States and Elementary German. This assignment meant preparation in three new courses. He was older than most of the other faculty members but he easily established rapport with them. He became a father figure to many faculty and students and his door was always open to those who desired counsel. When faculty meetings became tense, he had a mediating effect because he could speak from years of experience.³⁶

Students enjoyed the history classes and in their evaluation surveys cited not only his experience and factual knowledge, but also his ability to integrate his knowledge into a Christian worldview. His interest in the individual student was evident and one student wrote, "You are interested in me as a person." Since a large percentage of the students were American and this was the era of the Nixon presidency, there were also those who thought he was too critical of American politics. There were those, however, who

confessed to seeing beyond the American flag for the first time in their lives.

On August 12, 1972, daughter Wilma married Barry Kennedy, a non-Mennonite. Differences of doctrinal and ethical opinions between the new son-in-law and John created some family tensions, but ultimately emphasized a theme that came to dominate John's personal relationships in later years — the subservience of doctrinal conformity to Christian love and compassion.

On weekends John was usually speaking in one of the churches in the Fraser Valley. In the spring semester of 1973, he also taught North American Studies in Christianity at Regent College. The invitation to speak at the MBBC graduation on April 29, 1973 came as a pleasant surprise. He had not had much contact with the College since June of 1967, although through Conference committees he was aware of the problems facing the school. He had been deeply hurt in 1967 when no public acknowledgement had been made about his service to the College, but he was ready to leave this behind and start a new relationship with the school.

For the summer of 1973 John promised to go to South America on a theological extension pilot project sponsored by the Board of Missions and Services, the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary and the South American Mennonite Brethren Conference. Since Nettie had never accompanied him to South America, he was anxious that she come along, even though it would be at his own expense. The Seminary had made preliminary investigations and selected for the courses three sites which would have some library resources: Filadelfia and Asuncion in Paraguay, and Curitiba in Brazil.

The courses focused on Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren history and theology. The sessions open to the public drew an attendance of 250 - 300. Those restricted to serious students taking the courses for credit averaged in attendance between 12 and 25. John discovered that the question of Mennonite Brethren identity was not simply a North American phenomenon but a question South American MBs were wrestling with as well.³⁷

Since son John was at Harvard University doing graduate work in history, John and Nettie visited him and his wife Eleanor on their

way home. There were a few tense moments when John and Eleanor were not allowed near the Logan Airport because of the crash of a Delta jet. John and Nettie's plane was the first to land after the disaster in which eighty-eight of eighty-nine aboard were killed, and consequently the family reunion was emotional.

1974 was the centennial year of many Mennonites in Canada and John was concerned that his MB history volume be published that year. It was a year of disappointment in that respect. First there were numerous delays because of the music chapter which was to be written by a musician, and later the press encountered problems. John spent many hours going over galley proofs. By July he and Abe J. Klassen were finally corresponding with regard to footnotes, bibliography and index. John admitted his own inconsistencies: "In some cases my judgement may have been influenced more by diplomatic than historical considerations — as for instance the inclusion of contemporary evangelists in the index."³⁸

The highlight of the summer of 1974 was his attendance at the Oxford Reading and Research Conference Seminar on evangelical awakenings. Dr. J. Edwin Orr, director of the seminar, invited John to participate and to represent the Radical Reformation as a movement of church renewal. Partial funding from the Board of Reference and Counsel and the Board of Christian Literature made it possible. At the seminar evangelical scholars attempted to see God's redemptive activity in theological and historical perspective. Outstanding scholars presented lectures on the Lollards, the Reformation, Puritans, Pietists and Methodists. Each day one session was also devoted to a discussion of contemporary revivals around the world. At the end of the week John remarked that prayer was the "only common denominator in the great diversity of revivals through the ages." John also noted with interest that according to the reports and research evidence, charismatic manifestations, such as healing and glossalalia, played a minor role, if any, in most renewal movements. It was a confirmation of his own feelings on the subject.³⁹

By the fall of 1974, after two years at Trinity Western College, he was feeling at home and accepted by students and faculty alike.

Dr. Neil Snyder, the first President of Canadian origin, assumed office in the summer of 1974. He particularly appreciated having John on faculty because of his experience in administration at a small church college.

John and Nettie attended the College socials, basketball games, dramas and choir programs. John, however, drew a line — he would not solicit funds for the school or do deputation work, lest this be construed as undermining Mennonite Brethren schools. John was still on numerous MB boards and committees, and to them his loyalty remained.

On one occasion when John attended Board of Reference and Counsel meetings, he scheduled a film he had not previewed, on Swedish cultural life, to be shown in his History of Civilization class on his return. A portrayal of Swedish customs, such as the use of the bathhouses, thoroughly delighted the students but embarrassed John. Dean Downey, hearing a commotion, came into the class, and John had some explaining to do. From then on he conscientiously previewed all films. Irene, who attended Trinity in 1973-74 and commuted with her father, says she was never upset by attending a school where her father taught because the students respected him.

In both 1974 and 1975 he taught two Bible courses, Acts and General Epistles, as well as the history courses. One of the students in his Acts class commented, "I have learned more in this class than in any other." Another student felt teaching was not John's only contribution:

Thank you for your kindness, love and concern. I may forget everything about Canada and Trinity but one thing, your fatherly love, will linger with me all through my life and I will always remember you with gladness and appreciation.⁴⁰

In the spring of 1975 *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* finally came off the press. Dr. Ted Regehr, reviewing the book in the April 4 issue of the *M.B.Herald*, wrote that the book "belongs in the homes and libraries of all who wish to understand

the Mennonite pilgrimage." Regehr, on the whole very positive, felt that accounts of internal controversies and problems were treated rather too antiseptically, that the real nastiness had been cleaned up. A strong emphasis, with which Regehr concurred, was the Mennonite emphasis. In fact "the Mennonite emphasis is so strong that doubts sometimes beset the reader whether non-Mennonite influences that have helped make the Mennonite Brethren Church are given sufficient coverage." Nevertheless, Regehr viewed it as an excellent statement on how Mennonite Brethren view themselves, written by an insider, using the language and idioms of the people.⁴¹

Already in August, 1974, J.B. Toews had sent John an invitation to a symposium on Mennonite Brethren History May 1-3, 1975. The purpose of the symposium was: 1) to examine *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* and use it as a framework for the examination of current issues facing the MB Church, 2) to be the occasion for convening academics and teachers of Mennonite Brethren history in colleges, seminaries and Bible schools, and 3) to clarify the research tasks facing the Mennonite Brethren community. When the book came off the press in January, 1975, unbound copies of the book were sent to the symposium participants: Dr. John B. Toews, Professor of History, University of Alberta, Calgary; Dr. Clarence Hiebert, Professor of Bible, Tabor College, Hillsboro; Dr. C.J. Dyck, Professor of Church History, Associated Mennonite Seminaries, Elkhart; Dr. Frank Epp, President of Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo; Peter Hamm, former missionary and PhD candidate, Hamilton; Dr. John E. Toews, Professor of Bible, Tabor College, Hillsboro, and of course John. John was a bit wary at first since he was not certain that he wanted to be present if the occasion was to be an organized critique of the book. He was reassured that this was not the major purpose of the symposium, which was to raise the question of brotherhood identity at the academic level.

Nettie accompanied John to Fresno. At the banquet held at the end of the symposium a special tribute was paid to John for his accomplishment in writing the book. John concluded the

symposium by sharing some reflections on "Mennonite Brethren — Past, Present and Future." Although he made no attempt to foretell the future, he expressed some concerns and hopes. He was concerned about increasing polarization of theological perspectives between the "social action" oriented wing and the "fundamentalist" wing of the church. John feared an overemphasis on personal salvation could lead to barren fundamentalism and he viewed both extremes as unacceptable. He also expressed concern over an increasing fragmentation of missionary efforts and pleaded for wholehearted support of the MB mission program. His hopes included a recovery of the Anabaptist vision of Christian discipleship, which for John was New Testament discipleship. Christians should be known as "People of the Way," as were the Christians in the book of Acts. He also expressed a hope for the recovery of the Anabaptist vision of a covenant community. He concluded on an optimistic note: "It is Christ who builds the church through his Spirit."⁴²

The positive and supportive response to these reflections in part made up for the many times he had been critically received by the brotherhood. He wrote Elmer Martens several days after his return to B.C.: "We are much more conditioned to receive criticism than recognition, and hence the experience was simply overwhelming. For us it was a great encouragement to continue to serve the brotherhood to the best of our ability."⁴³

Although the Board of Reference and Counsel had requested in 1972 that John write a statement on the Mennonite Brethren peace witness, putting it into biblical and contemporary perspective, the resulting pamphlet, "Our Ministry of Reconciliation in a Broken World," was not published until 1975, after revision and review by the Board. Then it was placed as an insert in both the *Christian Leader* and the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. One American MB pastor strongly objected to John's statement that a church member who had participated in the armed services should be restored to fellowship on "repentance and recommitment." The pastor believed that a person could witness by being in the military forces and he was not the only one to hold such a view in the MB Church.⁴⁴

John's peace statement of 1975 was much broader in scope than previous statements. It was not a passive but an active lifestyle statement encompassing international, national and personal areas. In international conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli conflict Christians should stand between the two groups, ministering to both. Nationally they should be concerned with such issues as prison reform and rehabilitation of the offender. In industrial conflicts the brotherhood should speak to management to encourage fair and generous treatment of the workers, and it should encourage workers to support fair and reasonable demands. Should not the Christian community be an example in eliminating and resolving industrial tensions in the spirit of love? In race relations the ministry of reconciliation should promote equality in educational and employment opportunities. Economic tensions could not be resolved by mere verbalization or preaching; John stressed that there must be positive action and called for a reexamination of lifestyle and standard of living. To promote responsible stewardship, he called on the brotherhood to be concerned with the conservation of natural resources and to protest the use of taxes for military purposes. The basis of this 1975 peace statement was still Scripture. It presented his view, after twenty years of reflection and writing, of "the total gospel for the total man."

John and Nettie's fortieth anniversary was celebrated several months early, in August, after the General Conference in Winnipeg, where John had been elected Moderator. All the children and grandchildren were present and many relatives and friends shared in an "open house" at their home on James Street in Clearbrook. Because the five children were so scattered — David in veterinary school in Saskatoon, John in New York teaching at Columbia University, Elfrieda in Manhattan, Kansas, Irene in Vancouver at the University of British Columbia and Wilma in Richmond, B.C. — reunions were special. John was especially fond of the grandchildren and spent a lot of time with them — reading stories, going for walks and engaging in games he had never played with his own children. It was almost as if he wanted to compensate in the case of the grandchildren for earlier neglect of their parents. Wilma's sons in Vancouver benefitted especially as John and Nettie

dropped in frequently. John took the boys to the local library, something he had rarely had time for when his children were young. The grandchildren soon discovered that grandpa had a sweet tooth and that his pockets often contained an "O Henry" or "Sweet Marie" chocolate bar. Following an afternoon with the grandchildren, a favorite pastime was to drive to Vancouver's Stanley Park to watch the ships coming into the harbor. Observing the ebb and flow of the sea was relaxing and both John and Nettie found the sea air exhilarating.

They enjoyed their home in Clearbrook, the fellowship in the rural South Abbotsford MB Church, the teaching situation at Trinity Western College and the proximity to at least some of their children and grandchildren. The invitation, therefore, in November of 1975, to come back to Winnipeg to teach at MBBC and also to work for the MB Historical Committee of Canada, was cause for a lot of soul-searching. John was 63 years old. Did he and Nettie really want to move back to the harsh climate of Winnipeg and live in an apartment? Did he want to become involved once again in a Mennonite Brethren institution? The answer was "yes". He wanted to complete his teaching career within his own Conference.

The projected assignment with the Historical Committee envisioned students in Mennonite Brethren history doing supervised research. The Committee was also interested in getting provincial archival centers functioning and integrating these with the main Centre at Winnipeg. John was not interested in collecting primary sources but he was interested in creating historical consciousness in the brotherhood and he wrote Dr. Henry Krahn, President of MBBC: "What we need even more than a study center in our brotherhood is a sense of historical identity (including theological) and a historical consciousness."⁴⁵

Nettie did not look forward to living in Winnipeg, but John seemed so happy with his new assignment that she agreed it would be best to make the move. She knew she would especially miss the grandchildren in Vancouver. There were no children or grandchildren in the Winnipeg area.

Trinity Western College was sorry to lose John, particularly since they were making plans to expand from a two to a four-year

institution, and John had a PhD as well as many years of teaching experience. The four years he had taught there were well-spent and he had no regrets and many friends. Neil Snyder, President, said he would miss John's spirit of concern and the stability he brought to the faculty. Often he had been an encouragement to Snyder when the latter felt weighed down by the responsibilities entrusted to him.

On May 22, 1976, Irene, the youngest in the family, married Bill Maier, a fellow University of British Columbia student whom she had known from Bible schools days in Clearbrook. Now the nest was empty.

While Nettie spent much of the summer packing and sorting for the big move, John took his first trip to Southeast Asia. Since the Mennonite World Conference Presidium was meeting in Indonesia, the Mission Board asked John to minister to pastors, students and churches in Japan enroute to the meetings in Semarang, Indonesia.

John found the exposure to two new cultures in a few short weeks an enlightening experience. In Japan he was impressed with the density and concentration of population in large urban centers — the combined population of Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya equalled that of all Canada. He was also impressed with the economic prosperity he witnessed. At a seminar for national leaders on the Anabaptist concept of the church and biblical nonresistance, he was surprised, and delighted, to discover the keen interest in the Anabaptist heritage and identity. Mr. Massaru Arita, one of the pastors, gave him two booklets he had written, entitled *The Conversion and Call of Menno Simons* and *The Mennonite Brethren Church of Japan*, the latter beginning with an account of the Anabaptists in Switzerland and the Netherlands.⁴⁶

After the devastation at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese Christians were attracted to the Mennonite faith because of its emphasis on peace and nonresistance. John's book, *True Nonresistance Through Christ*, had been translated into Japanese as early as 1957 despite Mission Board reluctance, and many of the Japanese church leaders to whom he spoke in 1976 knew of him through this book. When he left he had invitations to come again to Japan to lecture.

Although Indonesia, like Japan, was densely populated, in the main island of Java with a population of 97 million in an area half the size of Kansas, John noted that poverty rather than prosperity was in evidence. The first overseas Mennonite church was established in Java in 1851 by the Dutch missionary Peter Jansz. In the twentieth century the church had suffered persecution as well as great revivals. Alongside the Javanese Mennonite Church there was also a Chinese Mennonite Church which had originated in 1920. This latter group invited the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions and Services to assist them in the training of national workers. John enjoyed fellowship with Dan and Helen Nickel and Dale and Joyce Warkentin, who were involved in missionary ministry. The Mennonite World Conference Presidium meetings were held at Semarang, Indonesia. Million Belete, the charismatic Ethiopian churchman who was Regional Secretary for the Bible Society in Africa and Chairman of the Mennonite World Conference, was John's roommate. Others present were Marvin and Mary Helen Hein, Frank and Helen Epp, Atlee and Winnifred Beachy, Henrique Ens, Paul Kraybill, Elmer Neufeld, Samuel Stephan and Carl Brusewitz. At the early Sunday morning service which these visitors attended, nine former Muslims confessed their faith in Christ and were baptized. It was a deeply moving experience. Though the Indonesian National Constitution promised freedom for the practise of the four major religions, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism, the Muslim influence was dominant and converts from Islam could face persecution.⁴⁷

When John returned to B.C. he had just enough time to pack his books for the big trek to Winnipeg. Irene and Bill volunteered to drive the U-Haul and John and Nettie followed by car. They leased their house in Clearbrook and rented a two-bedroom apartment at Valhalla Towers in North Kildonan, close to the busline and to the McIvor MB Church.

Return to MBBC

Since there were many who could not understand their decision to return to Winnipeg after being away from the College for nine years, John and Nettie wrote an "open letter" in the *College Bulletin* (November 1976):

Why... did we decide to leave our home, our family and our friends in the beautiful Fraser Valley and come to Winnipeg? Our response to the call of the College Board and Faculty was an act of faith and commitment to our Lord and to our Brotherhood. This commitment was motivated by the deep conviction that M.B.B.C. will continue to play a vital role in the preparation of our young people for service in our churches and in the larger constituency at home and abroad. We trust that under God we will be able to make a positive contribution to the training program which emphasizes discipleship, service and an Evangelical-Anabaptist theology.

The new MBBC venture was a joint venture and John realized that without Nettie's full support it would be impossible; writing a "we" was not a mere formality. For the first time in many years there were just the two of them and no children or grandchildren nearby. As a result both John and Nettie became intimately involved in the life of the students. Nettie, whenever possible, attended student prayer meetings and chapel services with John. Those who had known John previously as a teacher at MBBC said he had mellowed in the interim. He was not as dogmatic — he seemed to be able to see the world in shades of grey, not merely black and white.¹ He

had an inner security which allowed him to be at peace with himself. He had come to realize and accept the fact that our knowledge is "partial."

There was no problem with student rapport — his classes in Acts and Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren studies had large enrolments. He was pleased to see the students seeking out their historical roots. Their outer casual appearance, so different from that of students during the 1950s, did not necessarily mean a lack of inner direction and discipline. Female students no longer wore uniforms; shirts, ties and a clean-shaven look were no longer compulsory for men. Chapel attendance was encouraged but optional, and dating rules had disappeared. It was a new landscape, but John was more flexible than when he first arrived at the College to teach in 1947. He had mellowed and discovered that he had a niche in ministering to this new generation, many of whom were children of former students.

Typical, perhaps, of the kind of relationships he was able to establish with the students is an anecdote recounted by one of them:

Near the end of the first semester he stopped me outside his office and, with a look of fatherly concern, asked, "Are you going to take Mennonite Studies II next semester?" I replied, "Only if you give me an 'A' in Mennonite Studies I." "John, John," he responded, shaking his head and smiling gently. "How will it look in the press: 'Student President bribes Conference Moderator?'" We both laughed. I got an 'A'.

John's early rising routine had not changed over the years. Even in 1976 he was one of the first to appear in the College office with a cheery "Good morning." Nettie usually fixed him a sack lunch with a rye bread sandwich, an apple and several homemade cookies, and he looked forward to the noonhour discussions over coffee and sandwiches in the faculty lounge. Before he left for College in the morning, he always listened to the news. He was very much aware of current events and shared this awareness confidently during the lunch hour. Herb Giesbrecht, a colleague, remarked that if anyone had failed to listen carefully to the news or had difficulty in

interpreting events, he had but to listen to John to be promptly enlightened.²

As Moderator of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America, he chaired the Board of Reference and Counsel meetings held in Winnipeg in September 1976. *Anabaptists, Four Centuries Later*, the study by J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, had given Mennonite Brethren leaders cause for concern. In the chapter on attitudes towards various areas of social ethics — pacifism, race relations, welfare attitudes, anticommunism, antilabor unions and social concerns — the Mennonite Brethren ranked fourth out of five in adherence to the expected normative Anabaptist ethic of love and nonresistance (only the Evangelical Mennonite Church ranked lower). Mennonite Brethren ranked highest on the devotionism scale and lowest on the social concerns scale. Harder and Kauffman noted that one faith variable — fundamentalist orthodoxy — correlated, in a strongly negative sense, on all issues to the normative Anabaptist position as defined by the denominations.³ John had been aware of this situation for years and had commiserated with H.S. Bender and others about it. He hoped that this public exposure of MB attitudes would rouse leaders to action. Thus he encouraged the Board of Reference and Counsel to delegate brethren to write position papers on these issues in order that recommendations could be made to the Conference at large.

John was asked to write the paper on "Christianity and Communism." On the Kauffman-Harder scale Anabaptism was negatively associated with anticommunism and fundamentalist orthodoxy was positively associated with it. On a scale of 1 to 6, the Mennonite Church ranked 1.9 and the MB Church 2.9. It was clear that MBs differed little from other evangelicals. One third agreed that Christianity and Communism shared certain ideals, while two-thirds supported military resistance to the Communist world. There was a tremendous educational task ahead if some of these views were to be brought into line with Anabaptist ideals.

One reason John was asked to return to MBBC in 1976 was to help establish a Mennonite Brethren Studies Centre and be its first

scholar-in-residence. The Historical Committee of the Board of Higher Education, chaired by Dr. Helmut Huebert, was anxious to start such a Centre which would be the Canadian counterpart to similar Centres in Fresno and Hillsboro. John hinted that he was not interested in archival or administrative duties, but he was interested in research and in encouraging others in their research endeavors. The Committee promised him considerable freedom in developing a program for the Centre (two-thirds of his time was to be devoted to teaching and one-third to the Centre). An Advisory Committee was formed, consisting of five individuals to operate the center: Helmut Huebert, representative of the Canadian Conference Board of Higher Education; Herbert Giesbrecht, the archivist; Henry Krahn, a representative of MBBC; William Schroeder, member-at-large; and John, the resident scholar. The first actual meeting of the Advisory Committee took place on October 16, 1976. The Committee agreed that the function of the Centre should be to encourage scholars to do research and to critically evaluate Mennonite Brethren history. The results of the studies undertaken were to be disseminated to the constituency.

John was asked to identify possible areas for research and topics to be pursued. At the November 27 meeting of the Committee John suggested at least a dozen topics that he thought would be of interest to the Centre. These included the following: the effects of urbanization on the lifestyle of Mennonite congregations; reasons for the change from a multiple-lay to a one-man pastoral ministry in the MB churches in Canada; essential differences in faith and practice between Mennonite Brethren and other Mennonite groups in Canada; and the political involvement of Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren at local, provincial and federal levels. He hoped to assign several of these topics to his MB history class during the spring semester.

John became occupied with hermeneutics and the politics of hermeneutics as the time for a Study Conference on that topic at Fresno, on December 16 to 18, neared. The Board of Reference and Counsel had decided that since doctrinal unity was a problem among Mennonite Brethren, a Study Conference for Bible teachers of all postsecondary schools on the topic of hermeneutics (the

principles of Scriptural interpretation) would be beneficial. The Conference was announced in April and invitations were sent to the schools. Each school was allowed to send up to five representatives. There were others who asked to attend, yet there were also those who felt that if each school sent five the group would be too large.

David Ewert and H.H. Dueck, both from the Mennonite Brethren Seminary (Fresno), did most of the planning as well as the assigning of topics to individuals: Allen Guenther - Creation; Howard Loewen - The Place of the Woman in the Church; Elmer Martens - Old Testament Ethical Problems; Erwin Penner - Old Testament Prophecy; Devon Wiens - The Gospels: Are they History, Theology, Biography or What?

The question of attendance at the Conference by the editors of *The Christian Leader* and *The Mennonite Brethren Herald* created a flurry of letters. John felt these editors should attend. There had been unfavorable comments about "closed-door" sessions in the past. Nevertheless, he was cautious and suggested that the press releases be monitored to "safeguard our brethren who are willing to take an active part in our search for guiding principles of biblical interpretation."⁴ So when Wally Kroeker, editor of *The Christian Leader*, sent in a request to attend, there was a proviso attached to the permission: "Before the reports are published in our Conference papers, several brethren appointed by BORAC should have the opportunity to read the report, and where necessary suggest changes which may be deemed necessary."⁵ There were those on the Board who felt that even this was going too far and wished no press coverage — merely reports sent in after the event. Deeply ingrained in the Mennonite psyche was the fear of controversy and particularly its public display in church papers.

Perhaps a decade earlier the editors would have acquiesced and given the Board editorial sovereignty, but both Wally Kroeker and Harold Jantz argued that if they agreed to let the Board decide what could be printed, the integrity and responsibility of the church press would be eroded and they as editors would have abdicated the mandate given them as editors of the Conference papers. Wally replied on October 19: "We will listen to your counsel and guidance

in sensitive areas that perhaps exceed the journalists's grasp of hermeneutics and biblical scholarship. But we would have to draw the line if this guidance and counsel extends into the realm of censorship." After talking to both Wally and Harold, John assured concerned Board members that a brotherly agreement could be reached on the issue.

Since one of the topics assigned was "The Place of the Woman in the Church," one would have assumed that the Board would be anxious to have some Mennonite Brethren women present to discuss the issue. Several Board members wrote that Katie Funk Wiebe had requested to attend but they felt that this was not necessary, and John did not protest. Perhaps if the Study Conference had been concerned with Sunday School issues, women would have been invited, but women were not expected to have any expertise to share in the area of scriptural interpretation.

Paul Hiebert, Mennonite Brethren anthropologist, summarized the unwritten limits to ministry of Mennonite Brethren women in the church to the writer in an informal conversation:

Mennonite Brethren women are permitted to minister, even preach, to children and young people of both sexes up to the age of 18; they can minister to women between the ages of 18 and 65 and to men and women over the age of 65; on the foreign mission field they can minister to all ages and both sexes, doing the work of an ordained minister. White, adult males between the ages of 18 and 65, however, are forbidden territory — these are the persons who hold the power and have status in the church and women cannot minister to them."

John, as Moderator of the General Conference, was responsible for the introductory remarks at the Conference. He indicated that, historically, Mennonite Brethren had acknowledged the need for an historical-grammatical approach to the Anabaptist stress on the finality of the revelation of God in the New Testament, and to a Christological interpretation of Scripture. John was particularly concerned that the Conference not become a "battle for the Bible." They had met to discuss interpretation, not authority or inspiration. He reminded those in attendance that our knowledge is partial and

all should be willing to review, revise and enlarge their understanding.⁶

The papers were subsequently published in *Direction*, a quarterly publication of Mennonite Brethren schools, in the July 1977 issue. Each of the five papers dealt with a specific exegetical problem, with a view to the fact that the discussion following the presentation should focus on the hermeneutical issues, rather than on the problem itself. Delbert Wiens, editor of *Direction*, wrote the following comments:

It became clear that most of the participants accept, albeit critically, all or most of the major approaches to the texts that are used in contemporary scholarship despite the fact that these approaches often lead to "surprising" interpretations of what the texts "really mean." Something of a revolution is also in progress among us. It was also clear that those present retain, in their scholarship, the reverent intention to discover what the texts contain; and they desire, in their teaching, to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God.⁷

John was convinced that the interchange at the Study Conference was beneficial for those involved in the Bible teaching ministry, and the Board of Reference and Counsel immediately made plans for another conference in October, 1977.

John enjoyed his teaching and the interaction with faculty and students. His zest for the classroom had not diminished and enrolment in his classes was high. Nettie accompanied him on weekends when he visited local Manitoba congregations. Even the salary was such that he could start saving for eventual retirement in British Columbia. There was, however, a cloud on the horizon. In September, just after John and Nettie left Clearbrook, Nick, John's younger brother was diagnosed as having inoperable stomach cancer, with a life expectancy of less than a year.

John and Nick, a little over a year apart in age, were two very different individuals. Nick was an outdoors person who enjoyed hunting, fishing and working on the land. He also had an aptitude for mechanics: taking a car apart and putting it together again

challenged him. He was always active in the local church with informal musical groups, ushering or helping with the children's worship services, but larger conference and doctrinal issues did not interest him. John, on the other hand, had been a bookworm even as a young boy, and so he and Nick had not shared many activities. But John had an inner desire to get to know his brother and relate to him more meaningfully. He had hoped that after retirement he and Nick could go fishing together and share other activities.

The news about Nick's cancer was a real blow to John. His father's death in 1969 at the age of eighty-five had been expected, and his father had welcomed death and prayed for it. But Nick was only sixty-three. The inevitability of his own death and the finiteness of life thrust themselves upon him. As a result he became more aware of the gift of his own life and the value of close relationships with Nettie and his children and grandchildren. He took every occasion in the last few years to develop a sense of intimacy with him. Relationships took priority over meetings. Nick died on April 29, 1977. John and Nettie had flown to B.C. at Easter to visit him, and in the hospital they had sung the songs of the resurrection together. Nick, after a period of denial and battle, had come to resignation and acceptance of his own death. After sharing in his suffering, John too could pray that God would take him home.

That year, during Tabor College's commencement weekend of May 21-22, John was one of four men honored with an Alumni Merit Award. The other three were Dr. Jacob Friesen, who spent eighteen years as a medical missionary in India; Dr. Herb Friesen, who directed the National Organization for Ophthalmic Rehabilitation Institute in Kabul, Afghanistan for seven years; and Rev. Keith Krueger, the Young Merit winner, a minister of youth at the Crystal Evangelical Free Church in Minneapolis. John was cited for his Conference activities and for authoring *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*. Enroute to Hillsboro they visited with Wayne and Elfrieda and their two sons in Manhattan, Kansas. John later referred to the summer of 1977 as his inter-Mennonite summer. As Moderator of the General Conference of the

Mennonite Brethren, he was invited as a fraternal visitor to both the Mennonite Assembly in Estes Park, Colorado, June 18-20, and the General Conference Mennonite sessions at Bluffton, Ohio, July 28-30. The Mennonite Assembly had as its theme "On the Way with Christ." In his words of greeting John mentioned that the man who first introduced him to a deeper understanding of Anabaptism and a better knowledge of the Mennonite Church had been the late H.S. Bender. He also acknowledged the fact that the Mennonite Brethren were indebted to the Mennonite Church and its leaders for helping them rediscover the Anabaptist vision. John then went on to give a brief summary of the major issues facing the MB Church. In regard to theology, he listed hermeneutics and the question of identity; in ethics, the question of an Anabaptist lifestyle and stewardship; in education, the move to a joint U.S.-Canadian seminary; in missions, a partnership with churches in the Third World and with other Mennonite missions. He added that personally he regretted that MBs were not involved in designing the inter-Mennonite Foundation Series Sunday School material.

John enjoyed both the formal contact as well as the informal fellowship. He discovered that the concerns of the people were almost identical with those he found within his own church. He was always encouraged and hopeful after such encounters. In July he again represented the Mennonite Brethren, this time at the General Conference Mennonite Church Assembly at Bluffton, where the chosen theme was "Family in Focus." John, in his greeting, spoke of cultivating more meaningful relationships in the extended Mennonite family, stating that his own family had an excellent opportunity to do so since one son-in-law had roots in the (Old) Mennonite Church and one daughter-in-law was a member of the General Conference Mennonite Church. He again shared some of the concerns of the MBs in theology, ethics, education and missions, and closed with a call for the revival of the "theology of hope:" "Early Anabaptists were not united by their common background but by their common faith and hope. We have emphasized a common historical experience; we need to emphasize a common hope for the future."⁸

John realized that his positive experiences with other Mennonites were not typical of Mennonite Brethren in general. This fact bothered him and so he examined the past for possible reasons for this and then wrote an article for *Direction* (July, 1978). He noted that one of the main barriers was a lack of historical perspective. Mennonite Brethren attitudes were based on the "grid" of 1860 and most MBs did not realize that the present General Conference of Mennonites did not have its historical roots in the Mennonitism of nineteenth century Russia, but was a result of a church renewal movement in the United States and was formed at West Point, Iowa in 1860. John felt a basic reorientation was long overdue and he endeavored to promote it.

John also saw the MB emphasis on separatism, which in many instances resulted in isolation from other Christians, especially Mennonite Christians, as another reason for the lack of better relations. He advocated a better knowledge of other groups, based on intimate fellowship with them; this, he knew, could lead to a greater acceptance and appreciation of them. For the future he felt Mennonite Brethren could make their greatest contribution to the cause of Christ in inter-Mennonite endeavors. He was supportive of Myron Augsburger's vision of a united Anabaptist mission in new areas in which all Mennonite conferences would participate, even if the Mennonite Brethren would have to give up some vested interests.

He did not favor a Mennonite Brethren World Conference, fearing it might perpetuate a relationship of paternalism, but rather advocated the promotion of the larger brotherhood through the Mennonite World Conference, to which he felt the MBs could make a vital contribution. In August John had the opportunity to become better acquainted with the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (formerly the *Kleine Gemeinde*), when he spoke at their retreat for ministers and their wives at Clear Lake, Manitoba. It is interesting to note that topics for the retreat included, not only "The Minister and his Preaching," but also "Communication through Lifestyle," "The Minister's Self-Image" and "The Significance of Leisure in the Minister's Life." John commented that the last topic would have

been considered irrelevant a few years previously and admitted that as a young man growing up on the prairies in circumstances which reinforced the Puritan work ethic, he had associated labor with virtue and leisure with vice. He had since come to view leisure as necessary for the renewal of physical and spiritual strength. Now he urged others to engage in physical exercise; to develop hobbies and new skills; to read literature, philosophy, history, science and poetry; to develop an appreciation for the fine arts; and to enrich the marriage relationship. His horizons had widened rather than narrowed as he grew older. He encouraged other ministers to spend time with their wives away from their children, something he had practised only in his later years. He also urged them to spend time with their children, remembering that in this practice too he had often been remiss. There was evidence that some ministers' children were alienated from the church because their fathers had no time for them.

When Peter R. Toews resigned from Columbia Bible Institute in the spring of 1977 the Board, without consulting the faculty, had appointed Dr. Mikolaski, a Baptist theology professor, as President. John had been upset at the lack of consultation and expressed his feelings to Herbert Brandt:

I believe the procedure is not in keeping with the Brotherhood practice. In such an important decision the Brotherhood should be involved — in prayer and counsel. The faculty should be consulted as well since we are not a corporation but a community of brethren. I believe that you will also agree with me, that to put Baptists in leadership in one of our Conference institutions could cause tensions and problems....⁹

Events proved that the Board had made a mistake in appointing Dr. Mikolaski and within six months they were looking for a replacement.

Since John and Nettie travelled frequently, living in an apartment was more practical than renting a house. Friends suggested that they buy a house in Winnipeg, but since they eventually hoped to retire in Clearbrook, they decided not to do so.

The apartment was small but large enough to invite students over to share a simple meal or snack. They also enjoyed times with nephew Bill Baerg and his wife Irmgard and their children Matthew and Rachel, who were almost like substitute children and grandchildren. John and Bill would go down to the swimming pool to relax and swim a few laps. On one of these occasions John confided to Bill that if he could live his life over again, he would spend more time with his family and less attending meetings.¹⁰

John had certainly not cut down much on his own committee meeting schedule since returning to MBBC. Sometimes he had had difficulty in taking days off at Trinity Western College in order to engage in conference activities, but at MBBC there were fewer restrictions as long as classes were made up and extra assignments given. The Mennonite World Conference Presidium, at its meetings in Semarang, Indonesia in July 1976, took action to invite Mennonites from the USSR (from the Baptist Union, the registered Mennonite Brethren, and the registered Church Mennonites), to attend the Tenth Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference in Wichita, Kansas in July, 1978. Paul Kraybill, following the Semarang meeting, paid a visit to Moscow to discuss the possibility of a Mennonite World Conference delegation and how it could best be expedited with Alexei Bichkov of the AUCECB. As a result of Kraybill's visit, the AUCECB, in the spring of 1977, issued an official invitation for three Presidium members to visit the USSR from November 19 to December 2, 1977. The MWC President and Executive Secretary, along with John, a presidium member with fluency in German and an understanding of Russian, were to form the delegation. Although they were to be guests of the AUCECB, they were assured that they would be permitted to visit Mennonite communities and congregations.

John met Million Belete and Paul Kraybill at the Frankfurt Airport, from where they flew to Moscow together. They had a few uneasy moments going through customs when they were quizzed about the literature they were bringing with them — 100 Bibles and Testaments, 40 concordances and other miscellaneous books. With the help of the AUCECB representatives, they were, however, soon waved on. Million Belete, an executive member of the Bible

Society, was particularly happy that they had been able to accomplish this. After participating in services in the Moscow Baptist Church and meeting with the AUCECB officials, the MWC representatives, accompanied by Sergey Nikolaev and Traugott Quiring, flew to Frunze in central Asia, near the China border, the first stop on the itinerary. Although they had hoped to visit Novosibirsk and Karaganda, these two cities were not on the itinerary and they were informed that negotiation on the matter would be futile. So they sent cables to the Mennonite ministers at these centers and invited them to come to Alma Ata to meet with them there. John was somewhat tense during the various sightseeing tours at Frunze because he had hopes of seeing his Uncle Henry Harms, who lived on the outskirts of the city. He was relieved and overjoyed to see Uncle Henry, Aunt Helen, cousin Edward and another cousin in front of the Frunze church when he was taken to the evening service. Since he was allowed to travel within thirty miles of the city limits, Uncle Henry invited him to his home for a day.

John's mother, Agnes, had been the only member of the Harms family to emigrate to North America. Henry Harms, her brother, had been an instructor in Physics and Mathematics at a technical college in the Caucasus until 1937, when he was exiled to Pawlodar in Western Siberia. In 1954 he returned to the Caucasus and was asked to rejoin the teaching staff of the college. With pressure exerted by former students, now prominent in government positions, his house, which had been confiscated, was returned to him. Uncle Henry taught there until 1969, when he sold his home and moved to Frunze to retire in an area where other Mennonites had settled after the War.

In the privacy of Uncle Henry's home John found it easier to engage in serious conversation than in a hotel room that might be wired. Nevertheless, Uncle Henry spoke with praise for the economic and cultural achievements of the Soviet regime. He felt that in the area of literacy and general well-being of the working class incredible progress had been made, and only people who didn't want to work or who were drunkards remained in poverty. John

related what had happened to their family over the years and the day passed all too quickly.

Paul Kraybill, Million Belete and John met with a considerable number of Mennonite leaders in Frunze to discuss the purpose of their visit. In Alma Ata they were delighted to meet representatives from Karaganda and Novosibirsk, who had received the telegrams they sent from Moscow. They were, however, frustrated by the numerous tours they were obliged to take which left little time for the fraternal visits they really desired. John wrote in his diary: "Our hosts take their time when we visit museums or the public market on the way to church, but seem to be in a great hurry when we want to visit with brethren of the Mennonite Church."

In all, the delegation participated in twelve services, including eleven German and Russian Baptist services and one Mennonite service at Alma Ata. Usually two of the three delegates gave greetings and one delivered a longer sermon. The giving of gifts and lavish treatment of guests occasionally made them feel uncomfortable. John felt that Million Belete made a unique contribution to the delegation. When they talked of a worldwide fellowship in twenty countries, the fact that Million, a black Ethiopian, was President of the Mennonite World Conference, gave eloquent testimony to this statement. Many of the Russian Christians they met had never seen a black Christian and certainly not a black Mennonite who spoke no Low German. Many questions about the church in Africa were directed to Million and he stressed the fact that in many parts of Africa the church was a "suffering church," and with such a church the Russian Mennonites could identify.

Before the delegates left Moscow, Alexei Bichkov of the AUCECB asked that the Church Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren send nominees of those interested in going to the Mennonite World Conference to the Baptist Union. The Baptist Union would then select three of six names submitted to it and obtain government permission for them to go. Million Belete returned to Nairobi via Bucharest, and John and Paul Kraybill stopped in Frankfurt to discuss the visit with Walter Sawatsky, resident expert on Russian Mennonite affairs. In Winnipeg Nettie,

accompanied by Peter and Lydia Toews, greeted John at the airport. He was relieved to be back home.

The study conference on Eschatology, originally scheduled for October of 1977, was held January 25-27, 1978, at Fresno. Prior to the Conference the Board of Reference and Counsel met. Some of the topics for discussion on the agenda were: Mennonite Brethren involvement in the political order, the multiple ministry, an approach to capital punishment and the ordination of nonimmersed members. BORAC also changed the venue of the General Conference in August from Minot, North Dakota, to Buhler, Kansas, in order to make it possible for more participants to be involved in the Mennonite World Conference just prior to the General Conference.

Few topics have generated more heated discussions and divisions among Mennonite Brethren than eschatology — the study of the events and implications of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the consummation of world history. At times it appeared that extreme dispensationalism had almost obscured the centrality of Christ as the blessed hope of some Mennonite Brethren. Because the topic was of great interest to Bible teachers as well as to laymen, BORAC called for a study conference on the topic.

When the speakers were named there was immediate reaction. Loyal Funk, Moderator of the B.C. Conference, expressed concern that the papers would represent one end of the spectrum with regard to eschatological conviction in the brotherhood. He wrote that the B.C. BORAC thought that at least one paper ought to "present the rather distinct position(s) that are commonplace among our churches."¹¹ John replied that although it was too late to make major changes in the program, he hoped there would be frank and brotherly dialogue and discussion on the floor among brethren representing various points of view.

The program consisted of the following topics and presenters:

The Blessed Hope of the Church: Dr. A.J. Klassen;
 The Last Days: Dr. David Ewert;
 The Place of Israel: Dr. Victor Adrian;

The Tribulation of the Church: Dr. John E. Toews;
Millennialism and the Mennonite Brethren Church:

Dr. Abe. Dueck;

The People of God in Light of the Parousia:

Dr. J.A. Toews.

Speakers arrived at their conclusions on the basis of a thorough exegesis of the text and their approach was biblical rather than theological. The speakers were not there to defend a system but to discover new truth. The papers, with one exception, were published as inserts in both *The Christian Leader* and *The Mennonite Brethren Herald*. John's paper concluded the conference. He tried to bring into focus the implications of Christ's return for the way the Church lives in the interim. He challenged listeners to watchfulness, holiness and faithfulness: "True eschatology is always a call to action, never a retreat." It was not a new theme for John, but over the years he had reiterated that while the "calendar of events" was not important, the truth of Christ's coming was primary.

This time so many attended the Study Conference that the criticism was aimed at the fact that a large group discouraged discussion. The fact that the speakers were all seminary or college professors gave raise to the criticism that there was not enough involvement by church ministers. One minister wrote: "There is ... a restless concern and suspicion about the Seminary's loyalty to Scripture and Biblical Prophecy, and the Study Conference seems to have contributed to that suspicion."¹²

That winter the family experienced a sad event. John's father's death in 1969 had not been easy for his mother even though he had been blind and in ill health for a number of years. Much of her time and energy had been expended on his welfare. She had even stopped doing handwork so that she could save her eyes to read to him. For four years after Aron's death she continued to live in her own home. She continued to read a lot and in one two-year period read 100 books. In 1973, of her own volition, she moved into the Tabor Retirement Home to join many of her friends. On March 15, 1978, at the age of ninety-one, she died in her sleep. John spoke of

her triumphant faith at the funeral, little realizing that he would soon join her.

In addition to teaching three classes during the spring semester, John did a lot of homework for various summer assignments. In April he sent the children the following summer schedule. It certainly didn't appear as though he was anywhere near retirement age.

SUMMER SCHEDULE – 1978

1. April 28-30 Bible Conference, Medicine Hat, Alberta
2. May 4-6 Symposium on P.M. Friesen's Work (now translated) and committee meetings, Fresno.
3. May 7- Dedication Service of MB Church, Brandon, Manitoba.
4. May 15-18 Believers' Church Conference, Winnipeg.
5. May 21 Peace and Social Concerns, Niverville, Manitoba.
- * In addition — several writing assignments in May.
6. June 1-22 In Clearbrook (vacation) painting etc., on house, visiting with friends and relatives.
7. June 26-30 Speaker at Camp Evergreen, "Golden Years Camp," Sundre, Alta.
8. July 1-4 Canadian MB Conference, Three Hills, Alberta.
9. July 7-13 Winnipeg.
10. July 14-17 St. Catharines, Ontario — Golden Wedding of Aron and Gertrude Baerg.
11. July 21-22 Drive to Kansas.
12. July 23-24 Manhattan, Kansas.

13. July 25-30 M.W.C. in Wichita, Kansas.
14. July 31-August 1 Missions' Consultation, Hillsboro.
15. August 2-3 Board of Reference and Counsel Meetings.
16. August 3-6 General Conference of MB Churches in Buhler, Kansas.
17. August 9- Preparation for new school year and waiting for children and grandchildren to visit us — Winnipeg.

Since John had been one of the twenty-five translators involved in the translation of P.M. Friesen's work, he especially enjoyed the symposium sponsored by the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Mennonite Brethren Seminary to celebrate the publication of the translation of P.M. Friesen's work. Friesen's magnum opus, completed in 1911 and some twenty-five years in the making, was an attempt to explain and justify the Mennonite Brethren Church to the larger Mennonite society in Russia from which it had emerged.¹³

The translation had been undertaken to make MBs more aware of their heritage — to help awaken their historical consciousness. The symposium was an opportunity to examine present self-understanding in light of the past. The papers focused on the historical setting and major events in Russia, the problem of determining origins, and some of the major issues raised by the volume. There was also a paper on P.M. Friesen, as a person. The concluding paper, entitled "The Effects of P.M. Friesen on Mennonite Brethren Self-Understanding," was presented by J.B. Toews, the guiding force behind the translation and the symposium. He commented that P.M. Friesen spoke of a brotherhood in tension — the "all too strict ones" in tension with the "liberal ones." Had anything changed in 100 years? Later in May, after attending Presidium meetings in Chicago, John detoured down to Buhler, Kansas to acquaint himself with the facilities and administrative details for the MB General Conference. As Chairman he had to know what was happening with regard to Bible studies, registration,

public address system, press releases, secretarial help, special services, invitations to representatives from other Conferences and a myriad of other details. He was never without a pen or notebook — and things soon fell into place with the expertise of Nick Rempel, Pastor of the Buhler Church, and the many helpful committees involved in such an endeavor. John just had to make certain all the efforts were synchronized.

John had difficulty considering himself a "senior citizen since for many years he had been referred to as one of the younger men in the Conference. To be a speaker at a senior citizens camp was a new experience for him, but he and Nettie thoroughly enjoyed the five days in June at the "Golden Years Camp" in the Canadian foothills. Each morning John led a Bible study on 1 Peter: "Light for the Pilgrim's Path." In the afternoon, in between horseshoes, shuffleboard, trampolines and nature walks, he shared observations about some of his international experiences in Japan, Indonesia and the Soviet Union. The evening concluded with a discussion on "The Faith of our Fathers — What can we Learn from History?" Since most of the senior citizens preferred services in German, John gave his messages in German.

The camp was a brief respite before the conference season began on July 1. The highlight of the summer was the Mennonite World Conference in Wichita from July 25 to 30. Both John and Nettie were part of the largest crowd in Mennonite history, when over 16,000 Mennonites assembled in the Wichita stadium in 107° Fahrenheit for the Saturday evening service.

The theme for the Conference was "The Kingdom of God in a Changing World" and the four main speakers — David Schroeder, Paul Hiebert, Hank Kossen and Albert Widjaje — gave scholarly presentations on the subject, focusing on the worldwide problems of social injustice, economic inequality and environmental disaster. The presentations became the basis for 100 different Bible study and work groups.

Million Belete, Paul Kraybill, and John were especially happy to see the Soviet delegation at the Conference — the first Soviet delegation ever permitted to attend a Mennonite World Conference. It consisted of Jacob Fast, Sergei Nicolaev, Michael Zhidkov, Henry

Goertzen, Traugott Quiring and Bernard Sawatsky. Nicolaev and Zhidkov were Baptists, Fast and Quiring were Mennonite Brethren affiliated with the AUCECB, Goertzen was a pastor of an independent MB church and Sawatsky was a pastor of a "Church Mennonite" congregation. The Assembly was truly a world assembly with representatives from over forty countries. It was a celebration of global peoplehood. For John, the climax came Sunday afternoon when 7,600 participants from forty-four countries affirmed unity in Christ by joining in a communion service. This followed a moving testimony of self-sacrificing love by Festo Kivengere, exiled Anglican bishop from Uganda. For John this service was a foretaste of heaven. Certainly now the narrow, ethnic definition of Mennonite had been rendered obsolete. The church was truly a cross-cultural church. John also sensed an international desire for spiritual renewal and for faithfulness to respond to evil and injustice.

As a Presidium member, John was extremely busy during the five days of the Conference, but the kind of interaction and fellowship he experienced gave him inner renewal. Charles Christano of Indonesia was elected to succeed Million Belete as Chairman, with Marvin Hein, Hillsboro, elected as Vice-chairman. The new format with a General Council of eighty-six members instead of a small Presidium, went into operation at the end of the Conference. In order to ensure continuity, John, Marvin Hein and Edmund Janzen, all former members of the Presidium, were to be on the Council. There had been a request from the MCC Task Force on Women for the Mennonite Brethren to select one female representative, but to no avail.

Although the 54th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Buhler did not begin officially until August 3, there was a Missions Consultation from July 31 to August 1 and the Board of Reference and Counsel met on August 2 and 3. Thus, there was no break of pace or schedule for John. The theme for the Conference was "Christ's Mission — Our Mission." Issues such as political involvement, the urban challenge, hermeneutics, Sunday School materials and seminary education were of major import as well as the question of identity — a question that had been debated

throughout the 1970s. Some churches had dropped the name "Mennonite Brethren" in order to strengthen their local outreach. These churches feared that the ethnic and cultural aspects of the name deterred new converts from joining the fellowship. In 1977, in a debate on the topic, John advised caution: "We may gain a few converts in some localities but when I think of our total impact, the name "Mennonite", or "Mennonite Brethren", generally has a positive ring. It is a body of believers that stands for peace, for relief, for being concerned about your fellow man."¹⁴

He saw the Mennonite Church as one of the very few where the peace witness was deeply rooted in an evangelical, conservative theology as well as in the doctrine of discipleship. Rejection of the name might lead to rejection of this doctrine and disassociation from the larger body of Mennonites involved in the Mennonite Central Committee. He noted that "Mennonite Christians are people of integrity, dependability and faithfulness.... Even if a change of name did not lead to a surrender of evangelical-Anabaptist principles, it would take a generation or two to establish the kind of reputation the name Mennonite now has."¹⁵ In his opening message at the General Conference on August 3, John used the strongest words yet: "Some are calling for a change of name to make us more effective in our outreach. A change of name will not solve our problem. It will divide our focus, confuse our friends and perplex our society. A change of attitude and disposition, however, will be effective in winning people for Christ."¹⁶

John was utterly exhausted when the Conference was over. Despite reluctance on his part, he was reelected as Moderator for another three years. His grandsons in Manhattan, Kansas, enquired about the sores on his elbows and he admitted that they had been acquired through sitting at too many meetings with his elbows on the table. Since John's birthday was on August 15, Brian and Kevin decided to give grandpa his present early — a T-shirt initialled "J.A." to wear to College retreats and other suitable occasions. Maybe he could wear it to mow the lawn, instead of the customary shirt and tie! After just a day's rest, John was ready to move on — to go back to Winnipeg to prepare for his fall classes. He found it difficult to

relax — the work ethic was so strongly ingrained. If he took time to read a nontheological book, it was usually nonfiction, like *Working* by Studs Terkel or *The Best and the Brightest* by David Halberstam.

One question which had not been addressed at Buhler was the role and participation of women in the Mennonite Brethren Church. The Executive consisted entirely of men. In fact, the overall tone was male even though three women had been elected to Conference boards. Women seemed to be present only in musical groups, in the kitchen and at the typewriters. Was the call to Christ's mission at Buhler a mission for men only? Did the "our" not include women? There were women in the Conference who wondered about this and took the courage to write John. He admitted that women should be more involved in the decision-making process. John had made constant reference to the "brotherhood" at Buhler, but for him the term included sisters as well. It would, however, have been more diplomatic to refer occasionally to brothers and sisters. He commented: "I deeply regret that by example and lack of proper guidance, I failed to promote this sense of 'partnership in the Gospel' at Buhler. I am resolved to do my best to correct this wrong."¹⁷ In one of his last letters to David Ewert in December, he reiterated this concern: "I believe we need to make greater efforts to draw in our sisters into the decision-making process of the brotherhood, and into services where their gifts can be more effectively utilized." However, he was not ready to have them ordained — "that is where I draw the line."

An issue that had surfaced briefly at Buhler but had been left unresolved, was the issue of racial prejudice. A white brother had expressed concern, yet it seemed that the Conference could take action only by following bureaucratic procedure. First the question had to be addressed by the Board of Reference and Counsel. This was done on October 24. The Board recommended that a Christian sociologist develop an instrument to measure present MB biases and then test a sampling of the constituency. The results were to be reported back to the Board and, after the findings were gathered, BORAC, together with professional counsel, could suggest ways

whereby positive change might be effected within the Conference. John had long ago realized that change could be brought about through such a process and he had worked within the framework of Conference committees for peace and social justice issues for decades. But he and his colleagues probably didn't realize how such procedures might appear to a young idealistic individual concerned about prejudice.

The fall semester was busy but John was content and happy in his work. When he asked his Mennonite Studies class to write their reasons for taking the course, one student wrote, "To learn about Mennonite History from a man who has gained my unwavering respect." Many of the students were seriously interested in discovering their roots and those of non-Mennonite background sought to learn the history of the Mennonite people. Because he wanted students to be involved in research, there were always many papers to mark. Just before Christmas, when he was grading term papers, he sent Nettie as a goodwill ambassador (as he called it) to visit the children and grandchildren in B.C. Because Nettie had a freezer full of goodies, he even had some students over for hot chocolate and porzelki. On December 22 he and Nettie met at the Edmonton bus station to take the bus together to Grande Prairie, where David was practising as a veterinarian. Here they spent Christmas with David, Kathy, two-year old Matthew, and Irene and Bill, who had come from Kelowna. Matthew was especially enthralled to sit on Grandpa's lap and listen to him reading fairy tales. Although John complained of a sore left shoulder, which he attributed to arthritis, he insisted on shovelling the snow from the sidewalk during their stay. The days passed quickly and soon they were on their way back to Winnipeg to start the new semester.

On Monday, January 8, John spoke with joy and conviction in the regular chapel service about God's guidance in the lives of his children. On Thursday, January 11, he led the College faculty meeting, using 1 Corinthians 13 as a basis and underlined two major themes: the limitations of our knowledge and the power and permanence of love. Some faculty members apparently teased him a bit when, in his characteristically assertive way, he said: "I have come to understand more and more fully that our knowledge of

God's truth can only be partial."¹⁸ That afternoon, on his way home, he visited the conference offices, having a word for nearly everyone and speaking to Henry Brucks about his desire to visit the Quebec Mennonite Brethren churches.

On January 12 on his way to the College and the classroom, he suffered a heart attack. Saturday, January 13, he passed into the presence of the Lord. He had publicly expressed the desire to be taken out of life in the midst of his work and now his wish was granted.

In the hours before his death, all of the children except son John were able to attend his bedside. John was grounded enroute from New York by a severe winter storm and arrived only hours after his father had passed away. John A. Toews's final words to his children, which he urged them to remember and live by, were the verses of I Corinthians 13:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous, love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

When a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child;

when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face;
 now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I
 also have been fully known.
 But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the
 greatest of these is love.

His cheery "hello" would never ring down the halls of MBBC again. Never again would he sit in the chapel's front row and crane his neck to see if someone he was concerned about had appeared. Never again would he put his arm around a young colleague or hug a student as a sign of affirmation. Never again would he and Nettie sit on the sofa and watch the evening news together or read a chapter in John Dresher's *Spirit-Filled Fruit*. No more letters or prayers beginning "God, in his gracious providence"

For the family his death was so sudden, so brutal. Perhaps David, the poet of the family, expressed the feelings best in several poems he wrote months later:

Emmanuel

thousands of fathers dead before are no comfort
 in the presence of my dead father

promises of golden mansions deformed angels
 bubble gum and trumpets are no consolation

these religious politicians who speak of sleep
 to their adoring lambs they do not know my God my dark
 forsaken God

the only comfort after volcanic ruptures
 skies split by lightning and the thunderous
 toppling of heaven's gilded pillars is this:
 dead silence of wood and wet rock
 and the solitary punctuation of a frog
 with a comma promising.

An Explosion of Ice

an explosion of ice
so close
the cold shards slice
between my ribs

where he was a black hole
Sucked toward it I
am stretched distorted pulled
apart
The space is never filled:
constellation shattered

The minister lips cheerfully
of victors and overcoming
This can only be a triumph
from some vantage point
across the unimaginable black
chasm
for me no victory at all

I cannot imagine
this body not doing
am undone
by the fallow stopped head
I cannot articulate
this death
cannot disarticulate myself
from this event

Here is my father
black curly hair stocky frame
the flaming optimist
Here is the still-warm body
on the X-ray table Oh Papa Papa
here is my ribcage drifting in space

one
small ember
glowing
in its cleaning
claw¹⁹

That year (1979) the students of MBBC dedicated their *Yearbook* to John with this verse:

J.A. Toews

He taught our parents
and returned
to teach us.

He loved us.

He loved the church,
and his radiant love
taught us
to love.

He was certain,
and yet
he knew
God
(and others)
could teach him more.
He listened with us.

He taught a Gospel
which included
all of man,
all men.

And we,
we loved him.

A memorial service was held at the Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church in which he had preached over 300 times. He was recognized for his contributions to the Church as Conference leader and educator. Two favorite hymns of his, "I'm Pressing on the Upward Way" and "Lead on, O King Eternal," were sung by a mass choir composed of students and former students and directed by Bill Baerg. A second service was held at the Central Heights Mennonite Brethren Church in Abbotsford, and he was buried in the small country cemetery of the South Abbotsford MB Church.

In August, at the Buhler Conference (1978), John had called on Mennonite Brethren for a verbalization of the gospel and an incarnation of the truth:

We have board power; we have budget power; we have organization power; we have education power; we have media power but we lack the power of the Spirit.... We cannot be a first-century church or first-century Christians; but we can be New Testament Christians and a New Testament Church in the twentieth century.²⁰

It was a call for an authentic Christianity. In his life, with both its strengths and failings, he tried to show such authenticity. A man had once remarked to one of John's colleagues: "But J.A. Toews is a real Christian; His words and life are of one piece."²¹ This is the highest tribute John could have wished for.

ENDNOTES

Chapter I: Childhood and Youth

- 1 *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v "Toews", by C. Krahn; see also Goustav E. Reimer, *Die Familiennamen der westpreussischen Mennoniten* (Weierhof Post Bolanden, Deutschland: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1963), 119.
- 2 Benjamin H. Unruh, *Die niederlaendisch-niederdeutschen Hintergruende der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Scheider Verlag 1955), 311.
- 3 New laws included the requirement of universal military service. The colonies had provided food and shelter during the Crimean War 1854-56 but many felt they could not comply with the new laws. As a result, five delegations were sent to St. Petersburg between 1871-73. Even though the 1874 law allowed for noncombatant service, more than one third of the Mennonite population migrated to America; the Molotschnaer Mennonites to the United States and the Chortitzer Mennonites to Canada. See Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1962), 26.
- 4 *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v "Alexanderkrone Business School," by H. Goerz.
- 5 Interview with Mary Toews and Mrs. David Pauls, by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 19 October 1981.
- 6 Aron A. Toews Memoirs (henceforth AAT Memoirs).
- 7 John A. Toews (henceforth JAT), autobiographical tape, made in 1972.
- 8 AAT Memoirs. Ohrloff Reimers were noted for their melancholy and pessimism.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Interview with Mary Toews by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 14 July 1980.
- 11 JAT, tape.
- 12 He was always rather stern and melancholy and admitted: "When I see a tree, I see the dead branches first" (Peter Toews, 21 October, 1981). Peter, the youngest, was the practical joker and storyteller who would entertain nieces and nephews at family gatherings.
- 13 AAT Memoirs.
- 14 Peter Braun, "The Educational System of the Mennonite Colonies in South Russia," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 3,3 (July 1929): 169-182.
- 15 P.M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, translated from the German original (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press, 1978), 629.
- 16 AAT Memoirs.

- 17 Ibid.
- 18 In later years John quoted Goethe's poem concerning inherited traits:
Vom Vater hab ich die Statur,
Des Lebens ernstes Fuehren;
Vom Muetterlein die froh Natur
Und Lust zum fabelieren
(I've inherited my stature and sense of serious purpose from my father and my happy nature and creative impulses from my mother).
- 19 Interview with Mary Toews by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 14 July 1980.
- 20 AAT Memoirs.
- 21 Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 30.
- 22 AAT Memoirs.
- 23 J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1975), 108.
- 24 AAT Memoirs.
- 25 Interview with Mary Toews by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 19 October 1981.
Interview with Mary Toews, 19 October 1981.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 447, footnote 13.
- 28 Ibid., 110.
- 29 AAT Memoirs.
- 30 Alvin J. Miller, "Relief Work in Revolutionary Russia," *Mennonite Life* 17(July 1962): 130; P.C. Hiebert, *Feeding the Hungry* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1929), 216.
- 31 AAT Memoirs.
- 32 Peter Braun, "The Educational System," 177.
- 33 JAT, tape.
- 34 J.A. Toews, "My Testimony".
- 35 Letter of Jacob I. Regehr to Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 25 August 1980.
- 36 JAT, tape.
- 37 J.B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland* (Scottdale PA: Herald Press, 1967), 87.
- 38 Interview with Mary Toews by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 14 July 1980.
- 39 Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 103.
- 40 AAT Memoirs.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 JAT, tape.

Chapter II: New Beginnings

- 1 AAT Memoirs.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 As Chairman of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, Toews worked unwaveringly to aid the immigration to Canada and over 20,000 Mennonites from Russia came to Canada between 1923-30 under the Board's auspices.
- 4 JAT, autobiographical tape.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 George Lane did very well on his ranch until World War I, planting some wheat and raising thoroughbred Percheron horses.
- 7 Henry C. Klassen, "The Mennonites of the Namaka Farm," *Mennonite Life*, 30 (December 1975): 10.
- 8 Ibid., 11.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 AAT Memoirs.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 JAT, autobiographical tape.
- 13 AAT Memoirs. The Namaka Church joined the Mennonite Brethren Conference in 1942.
- 14 JAT, notes used in a College chapel talk.
- 15 Letter from Mrs. Peter Dick to Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 27 January 1982.
- 16 JAT, chapel notes.
- 17 Lewis H. Thomas, ed., *William Aberhart and Social Credit in Alberta*, (Vancouver, BC: Copp Clark Publishers, 1977).
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 He voted for the Social Credit Party only once in 1935. Thereafter he usually voted the Liberal ticket.
- 21 JAT, chapel notes.
- 22 JAT, Diary – Periodically John wrote in a personal diary.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 JAT, autobiographical tape.

Chapter III: Formative Years: 1937-1947

- 1 JAT, Diary.
- 2 Interview with A.E. Janzen by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 17 September 1981.
- 3 William J. Schmidt, "History of Tabor College" (MA thesis, Vancouver School of Theology, 1975).

- 4 *Yearbook of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America. Reports for the Years 1937-1939.* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1939), 27.
- 5 Interview with Roy Just by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 22 October 1981.
- 6 JAT, Diary.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Interview with Dan Friesen by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 10 September 1981.
- 9 Nettie Toews.
- 10 JAT, Diary.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 There was a conflict in Coaldale between the settlers who originally came from Orenburg, in northern Russia, and those from the southern Molotschna Colony. The latter, including Johann Toews, placed more emphasis on education and considered themselves more progressive. Due to the resulting friction, Johann Toews moved to Hepburn and taught in the Hepburn Bible School a number of years before returning to Coaldale. Interview with Mr. and Mrs. David Pauls, 19 October 1981.
- 13 JAT, notes.
- 14 *Coaldale Bible School Prospectus: 1943-44.*
- 15 Interview with Jacob H. Quiring by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 19 October 1981.
- 16 Interview with Abe J. Klassen by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 21 October 1981.
- 17 David Ewert, "John A. Toews -- In Memoriam," *People of the Way: Selected Essays and Addresses by J.A. Toews*, edited by A.J. Dueck, H.J. Giesbrecht, A.R. Guenther (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press 1981), 7.
- 18 Interview with A. J. Klassen by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 21 October 1981.
- 19 Nettie Toews.
- 20 Frank C. Peters and Heinrich Regehr, eds., *Beschluesse und Empfehlungen der Kanadischen Konferenz der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde 1910-1960*, (Winnipeg, MB: Kanadische Konferenz der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde, 1961), 228-29
- 21 John A. Toews, *Alternative Service During World War II* (Winnipeg, MB: Publications Committee, Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1959), 100.
- 22 *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, 11 May 1979, letters to the editor.
- 23 Interview with Frank C. Peters by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 17 November 1981.

- 24 The United Church was formed in Canada in 1925 when major Protestant denominations merged: the Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists.
- 25 Toews, *Alternative Service During World War II*, 104.

Chapter IV: College Teaching

- 1 *Yearbook of the Northern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America. Reports for the Years 1938-39.* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1939), 25.
- 2 J.B. Toews, son of Johann Toews and John's cousin, possessed a BD degree from the Conservative Baptist Seminary (Portland, OR) and had done some work toward a ThD at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Fort Worth, TX).
- 3 J.B. Toews, "Influences That Have Affected Educational Processes in Mennonite Brethren Schools". Unpublished paper, 1978, 8.
- 4 This is not unique to Mennonite Brethren. Richard Hofstadter points out that "The Christian community was perennially divided between those who believed that the intellect must have a vital place in religion and those who believed that intellect should be subordinated to emotion or in effect abandoned at the dictates of emotion." Richard Hofstadter. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 55.
- 5 JAT, "Church History" lecture notes.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 JAT, "Mennonite History" lecture notes.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 JAT, "Acts" lecture notes.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 "Rules and Regulations of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College", circa 1948.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 John A. Toews. *Olive Leaf* (October 1949): 6-7.
- 14 Interview with Dr. Clarence Hiebert by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 10 September 1981.
- 15 Harold S. Bender, Dean of Goshen Biblical Seminary and a leading Anabaptist scholar, gave the 1943 presidential address at the American Society of Church History, entitled "The Anabaptist Vision." This statement became internationally known for expressing the essence of Anabaptism and was published in *Church History* 14 (March 1944): 3-24.
- 16 JAT, sermon notes.
- 17 Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1981), 267.

- 18 JAT, notes on "Anabaptism."
- 19 The General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, consisting of three U.S. District Conferences and the Canadian Conference, meets every three years and has responsibilities for issues affecting the Church as a whole, such as doctrine, ethics, foreign missions, and seminary education.
- 20 The General Conference Mennonite Church was organized at West Point, Iowa, on May 28, 1860, by a group of Mennonite believers interested in evangelism and church growth, under the leadership of John Oberholtzer. Later, many nineteenth century immigrants from Russia, Prussia, Poland and Switzerland joined this Conference.
- 21 Personal correspondence between John A. Toews and B.B. Janz, 1951.
- 22 Personal correspondence. His sermon topics were: "Christ: the Perfect Pattern," "New Testament Principles of Non-resistance," "Non-resistance in the Early Church," and "The Challenge of Non-resistance Today."
- 23 Personal correspondence.
- 24 Letter from John A. Toews to P.C. Hiebert, 25 February 1951.
- 25 *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Paraguay," by A.E. Janzen.
- 26 Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 428.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Report to the Committee, 1951.
- 29 Interview with Nettie Toews.
- 30 Letter from John A. Toews to J.B. Toews, 1952.
- 31 Letter from B.B. Janz to John A. Toews, 1952.
- 32 JAT Diary, 1952. He writes that both Burkholder and Wenger take a fine evangelical stance and are tolerant on the question of baptism.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Letter by John A. Toews to Dalmeny, 19 November 1952.
- 40 Letter by E.J. Swalm to John A. Toews, 13 March 1953.
- 41 Letter from P.C. Hiebert to John A. Toews, 9 June 1953.
- 42 David Ewert was a welcome addition to the MBBC faculty in 1953 but George D. Huebert left and so there was no resultant increase in the number of teachers.
- 43 J.A Toews, "A Conference on the Church and Peace," *The Voice* 2 (November-December 1953): 16.

- 44 J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, 202.
- 45 At the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Board of Reference and Counsel in November, 1953, it was mentioned that the interests and needs of the U.S. and Canada differed. In Canada 90 percent of church services were held in German and most churches had a lay rather than a paid pastor. Economically, Canadian churches had not been able to support projects as fully as had the U.S. because of the transportation debt and the great Depression.
- 46 Letter from J.J. Toews to John A. Toews, on behalf of the Educational Committee of Tabor College, 30 September 1953: "May I urge you to give this matter your prayerful consideration and not cast it aside just because it might impair your reputation of being an unquestionably loyal Canadian." John replied on 22 October 1953.
- 47 Letter by P.C. Hiebert to John A. Toews, 24 April 1954.
- 48 Letter from John A. Toews to C.J. Rempel, 26 February 1955.
- 49 Letter from J.A. Toews to C.J. Rempel, 16 June 1955.
- 50 Paul Erb, Review of *True Nonresistance Through Christ, Gospel Herald* 49 (7 August 1956): 755.
- 51 *Mennonite Weekly Review* 34 (20 September 1956): 5.

Chapter V: Leadership and Responsibility

- 1 Letter from Andrew Shelly to John A. Toews, 30 March 1957.
- 2 *Yearbook of the Forty-sixth Canadian Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America: 1956* (Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press, 1956), 86.
- 3 The National Association of Evangelicals was founded by conservative evangelical Christians in 1944 as a counterpart to the National Council of the Churches of Christ in America.
- 4 Board of Reference and Counsel of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America. Correspondence, Spring, 1955.
- 5 Letter from John A. Toews to B.B. Janz, 1 October 1956.
- 6 Letter from John A. Toews to H.S. Bender, 12 February 1957.
- 7 David Ewert, "John A. Toews: In Memoriam," p. 10.
- 8 *Ibid.* 10.
- 9 Interview with Harold Jantz by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 12 November 1981.
- 10 Interview with Charlotte Janzen and Anne Schmidt by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 14 November 1981.
- 11 Interview with F.C. Peters by Elfrieda Toews Nafziger, 17 November 1981.

- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Notes on "Trends in the M.B. Church," 1958.
- 14 Notes on the "Centennial address," 1960.
- 15 E. Morris Sider, *Messenger of Grace: A Biography of C.N. Hostetter, Jr.* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1982), 214.
- 16 *The Alliance Witness* (25 May 1966).
- 17 Letter from P.C. Hiebert to John A. Toews, 17 June 1960.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Letter from Melvin Gingerich to John A. Toews, 7 May 1960.
- 20 Tape by Victor Martens, May 1983.
- 21 Paper by F.C. Peters, "M.B.B.C. Philosophy of Education", 6, in MBBC Faculty Minutes and Records, 1962.
- 22 "The Call to Bear Witness," Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *The Lordship of Christ: Proceedings of the Seventh Mennonite World Conference, 1-7 August 1962* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonite World Conference, 1962), 236-237.
- 23 Letter from Frank C. Peters to John A. Toews, 27 March 1972.
- 24 See "Foreword" to *The Lordship of Christ*, 3.
- 25 Interview of Abe J. Klassen with Harold S. Bender, 21 October 1981.
- 26 "Tribute to H.S. Bender," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 38 (April 1964), 207.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Personal correspondence, Mennonite Brethren Bible College. Presidential Files, March 1962.
- 29 Personal correspondence, Mennonite Brethren Bible College. Presidential Files, 7 March 1962.
- 30 Letter from Dr. Ralph Giesey to John A. Toews, 7 February 1964.
- 31 Letter from Dr. Ralph Giesey to John A. Toews, 29 May 1964.
- 32 Letter from Frank H. Epp to John A. Toews, 16 September 1965.
- 33 Letter from William T. Snyder to John A. Toews, 25 May 1983.
- 34 Letter from John A. Toews to Edgar Metzler, 20 July 1964.
- 35 Letter from John A. Toews to Marlin Miller and Edgar Metzler, 3 February 1966.
- 36 Report by John to the Board of Missions, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America, September 1966.
- 37 John had written Delbert Wiens a note of appreciation, and Delbert's father, H.R. Wiens, had remarked, "This gives me hope for the future of our church. God grant us more such brethren who will not fear to speak out, and give us the truth in the spirit of love and deep concern."
- 38 June 1966, Report to Mennonite Brethren Board of General Welfare and Information Services.
- 39 South American Diary, 1966.

- 40 Letter from John A. Toews to J.H. Quiring, 23 March 1966.
- 41 Letter of John A. Toews to J.H. Quiring, January 1967.
- 42 Letter from Wilmer Kornelson to John A. Toews, January 1967.
- 43 Letter from John A. Toews to Wilmer Kornelson.

Chapter VI: Interlude

- 1 Letter of John A. Toews to Henry Brucks, 29 September 1967.
- 2 Letter from Henry Brucks to John A. Toews, October 1967.
- 3 Irene's Diary.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Trip Diary.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Letter from John A. Toews to Henry Brucks, 14 February 1968.
- 9 J.A. Toews, "Case for Church-based Evangelism in Germany", *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 7 (26 April 1968): 8-9.
- 10 Letter of John A. Toews to Frasersview MB Church, 12 February 1967.
- 11 Trip Diary.
- 12 Trip Diary. See also Marvin Hein's obituary tribute to John, "J.A. Toews — a Gift to the Church," in *Christian Leader* 42 (30 January 1979): 28.
- 13 Trip Diary.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 "Reflections on Mennonite Brethren Historiography", *Direction* 3 (July 1974): 217-218.
- 16 Letter from John A. Toews to Abe J. Klassen, 21 February 1969.
- 17 Letter from John A. Toews to Henry Loewen, 31 October 1969.
- 18 Personal correspondence of John A. Toews, 16 June 1970.
- 19 Trip Diary.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Report in *Christian Leader* 33 (2 June 1970): 6-7.
- 22 Letter from John A. Toews to John Lapp, 21 August 1970.
- 23 Personal correspondence of John A. Toews, 16 June 1970.
- 24 Interview of Elfrieda Toews Nafziger with P.R. Toews, 21 October 1981.
- 25 "Statement of Understanding", 21 December 1970.
- 26 Letter from Dan Friesen to John A. Toews, 1 December 1969.
- 27 Regent College brochure, 1970-71.
- 28 Interview of Elfrieda Toews Nafziger with Dr. Carl E. Armerding, 14 October 1981.
- 29 Letter from a Notre Dame High School teacher to John A. Toews, 26 May 1971.

- 30 Interview of Elfrieda Toews Nafziger with Rita Block, 13 October 1981.
- 31 Notes on "The Witness of Hope Amidst Conflict" lecture.
- 32 "Consultation Forum" notes, 3 September 1971.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 "Reflections on Mennonite Brethren Historiography," *Direction* 3 (July 1974): 222-223.
- 35 Letter from John A. Toews to Dean Asa, 21 November 1971.
- 36 Interview with David Twiest, Head Librarian of Trinity Western University, 20 October 1981.
- 37 Trip Diary.
- 38 Letter from John A. Toews to Abe J. Klassen, 30 July 1974.
- 39 "Oxford Seminar on Revivals," *Christian Leader* 37 (15 October 1974): 21.
- 40 Student evaluation forms.
- 41 Ted D. Regehr, "Speaking the Language of Mennonite Brethren," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 14 (4 April 1975): 5-6.
- 42 "Mennonite Brethren — Past, Present and Future" lecture notes.
- 43 Letter from John A. Toews to Elmer Martens, 10 May 1975.
- 44 Letter from Elmer Martens to John A. Toews, 18 September 1975.
- 45 Letter from John A. Toews to Henry Krahn, December 1975.
- 46 Japan Diary.
- 47 Trip Diary.

Chapter VII: Return to M.B.B.C.

- 1 Conversation between Elfrieda Toews Nafziger and James Pankratz, November 1981.
- 2 Herbert Giesbrecht in *Mennonite Brethren Bible College Bulletin* (Fall 1978/Winter 1979): 3.
- 3 J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later: A Profile of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Denominations* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1975), 149.
- 4 Letter from John A. Toews to David Ewert, 22 September 1976.
- 5 Letter from John A. Toews to Wally Kroeker, 4 October 1976.
- 6 J.A. Toews in *Direction* 6 (July 1977): 3-5.
- 7 Delbert Wiens in *Direction*, 6 (July 1977): 2.
- 8 J.A. Toews notes.
- 9 Letter from John A. Toews to Herbert Brandt, 10 May 1977.
- 10 Conversation between Elfrieda Toews Nafziger and William Baerg, November 1981.
- 11 Letter from Loyal Funk to John A. Toews, 13 December 1977.
- 12 Letter from J.A.F. to John A. Toews, 20 May 1978.
- 13 Letter from John A. Toews to Herbert Brandt, 1978.

- 14 J.A. Toews, in *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 16 (14 October 1977): 7.
- 15 Quoted in *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 18 (17 January 1979): 12.
- 16 J.A. Toews, in "Christ's Mission — Our Mission", in the *Yearbook of the 54th Session. General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches convening at Buhler, Kansas — August 3-6, 1978*, 212.
- 17 Letter from John A. Toews to David Ewert, 17 November 1978.
- 18 Quoted by John Regehr, "Early Reflections on the Death of J.A. Toews," *Mennonite Brethren Bible College Bulletin*, (Fall 1978/ Winter 1979): 4.
- 19 David Waltner-Toews, *Good Housekeeping* (Winnipeg, MB: Turnstone Press, 1983), 60, 57.
- 20 J.A Toews, "Christ's Mission — Our Mission," 211-212.
- 21 Quoted by John Regehr "Early Reflections" 4.

A MAN OF HIS WORD

John A. Toews symbolized the Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage in the North American Mennonite Brethren Conference for many years. His graduate studies culminated in a Ph.D. dissertation on 16th century Anabaptism. His teaching, although by no means limited to Anabaptist and Mennonite studies, was largely devoted to this area. His major publications, including True Nonresistance Through Christ and A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church, focused on this subject. Many of his committee responsibilities were of an inter-Mennonite nature, including an extensive involvement with the Mennonite World Conference.

This book by Elfrieda Toews-Nafziger, the eldest daughter of John A. Toews, tells the story of her father in a sympathetic, but not uncritical manner and thereby enriches our understanding of the Mennonite Brethren Church in a critical era of transition in the North American context.

